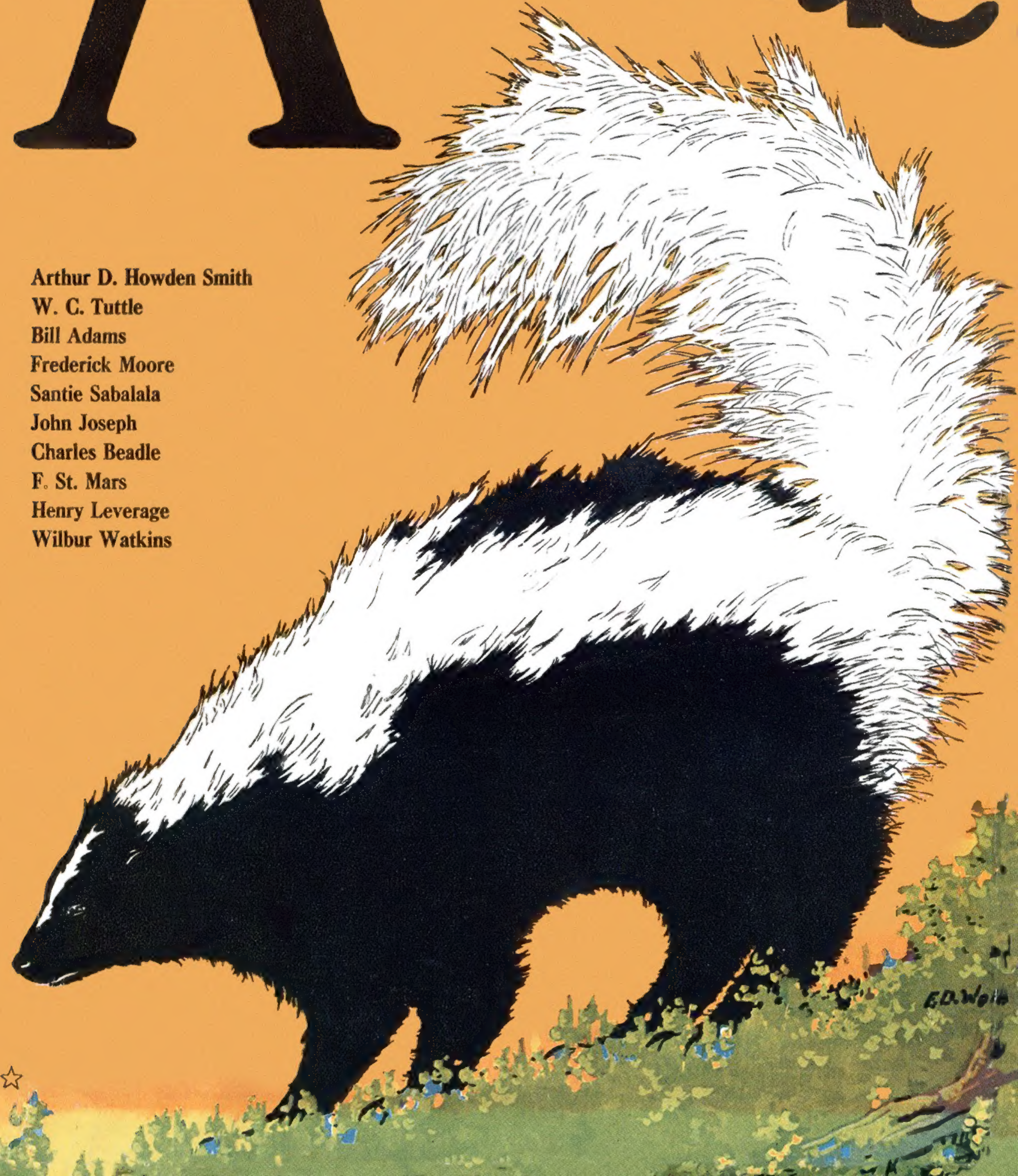
MARCH
30th
1922
25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

Arthur D. Howden Smith
W. C. Tuttle
Bill Adams
Frederick Moore
Santie Sabalala
John Joseph
Charles Beadle
F. St. Mars
Henry Leverage
Wilbur Watkins



Let $12.00 to $30.00 a Day Be Your Goal

Let ELECTRICITY Be Your Route

LET ME BE YOUR GUIDE

A Big-Pay Job is Waiting for You

ELECTRICITY IS THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Don't wish any longer, BE a success! I'll show you how!

Be An "Electrical Expert"

You want to get ahead—you want to make more money—big money—Electricity is the field for you! It is the big pay profession of today; **but you must be trained**; you **must know** Electricity from every angle to hold down a big-pay job—the job that pays.

Earn $12 to $30 a Day

Compare your present salary with these big pay figures. How does your pay envelope "stack up" with that of the trained "Electrical Expert?" Is his pay twice, three or four times as much as you now earn? Don't envy him, don't just wish for pay like his—go after it yourself! You can get it because

I Will Show You How

Yes sir—right in your own home in your spare time I will make you a Certificated "Electrical Expert"—a "Cooke-trained man." As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My system is simple, thorough, complete—no big words, no useless theory, no higher mathematics, just compact common sense written in plain English.

If you are ready, I am. You don't have to know the first thing about Electricity **right now.** I will train you in a few short months so that you can step right into that big pay business—the job you have always wanted.

"Electrical Experts" are in big demand—more jobs than men to fill them. It doesn't make any difference what you are doing, or what you have been doing, if you want to succeed—if you want big pay—I'll show you how because **I know I can teach you Electricity.** Opportunities in Electricity, great as they are today, are nothing as compared to what they will be tomorrow. Get ready for tomorrow! Get started now! Get in on the ground floor—ahead of the other fellow—jump from a "bossed" into a "bossing" job—jump from $3 to $5 a day to $12 or $30 a day. I know you can succeed once you're a "Cooke-trained man."

I Guarantee Satisfaction

There's no chance for failure with me. I train you RIGHT and furthermore I agree, if you're not entirely satisfied, to return every penny you have paid me. No other school will do this for you.

FREE Electrical Outfit

To make your success still more certain I give you free a splendid outfit of tools, materials and supplies—you do practical work right from the start and pick up extra money doing spare-time work

Mail This Coupon Today

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer,
Chicago Engineering Works, Dept. 433
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Send me at once your Big Free Book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert," and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name...

Address...130

Save $45.50 by Enrolling Now

If you will send this coupon today, I'll show you how to save $45.50. Write today for full particulars—also my big FREE book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert." It's the first step towards that big pay job of yours.

L. L. COOKE, CHIEF ENGINEER
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
INCORPORATED
Dept. 433 2150 Lawrence Avenue

THE "COOKE" TRAINED MAN IS THE "BIG-PAY MAN"

FREE TRIAL

No Money Down

13c a day soon buys an Oliver Typewriter—latest model

Before you realize it you have this splendid Oliver paid for. And you get to use it right away — while you pay.

To begin with, you save $50.50 on the price, for we now sell the standard $100 Oliver for $49.50 cash, or you can save $45 if you pay the installment price of $55. It is our latest and best model, the No. 9, brand new.

We are able to make these great savings for you through the economies we learned during the war. We found that it was unnecessary to have great numbers of traveling salesmen and numerous, expensive branch houses through the country.

We were also able to discontinue many other superfluous sales methods.

You may buy direct from us, via coupon. We even send the Oliver for five days free trial, so that you may act as your own salesman. You may use it as if it were your own. You can be the sole judge, with no one to influence you.

sed by U. S. teel orpo-ation, ew York entral Lines, ational City ank of New ork, Encyclo-edia Britan-ica, New York dison Co., Otis levator Co., oston Elevated ailways, and ther big concerns.

Manufactured by
The Oliver Typewriter Co
Chicago, U.S.A.
No. 9

Now $49.50

$100 Value

Let us send you the Oliver for Free Trial. The coupon brings it.

If you agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, pay $49.50 cash for it, or $55 in installments—$3 after trial, then $4 per month.

If, after trying it, you wish to return it, we even refund the out-going transportation charges. So the trial does not cost you a cent. Nor does it place you under obligations to buy.

Our new plan has been a tremendous success. We are selling more Olivers this way than ever before. Over 900,000 Olivers have been sold! Oliver popularity is increasing daily.

This, the Oliver 9, has all the latest improvements. It is noted for its sturdiness, speed and fine workmanship. It is handsomely finished in olive enamel and polished nickel. If any typewriter is worth $100, it is this Oliver, for which we now ask only $49.50, after its being priced for years at $100.

Mail the coupon for EITHER a free trial Oliver or further information. Be your own salesman and save half. This is your great opportunity.

Canadian Price, $79

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
733 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

This coupon brings you a Free Trial Oliver without your paying in advance. Decide yourself. Save half.

Or this coupon brings further information. Check which you wish.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
733 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $55 as follows: $3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $49.50.

If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is ....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name ....

Street Address ....

City .... State ....

Occupation or Business ....

ADVENTURE
March 30th, 1922

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 33
Number 6

KING-
OF KEARSARGE
ARTHUR O. FRIEL

Camp-Fire Comrades—
Meet a Fighting Man!

YOU have trailed with Lourenço and Pedro through the jungle of the Javary—followed old Mac, the "Armadilho," in his relentless tracking of the slayers of his son—watched McKay and his mates battle against the Red Bone cannibals. Now meet

KING—OF KEARSARGE
By Arthur O. Friel

A two-handed man who fights to a finish is Donald King. From the night when his avenging six-gun silences the pistol of a New York millionaire to the time of his death-grapple with a half-breed in a burning cabin amid the Northern snows, he battles against men and Fate. You will be proud to know him and his friends—Joe Dale, the sturdy old cripple, and Pansy, the winsome mountain maiden—a *real* girl. And Red Hawkins, lumber-camp bully; Black Jules, sinister prowler of the wilderness—these and others wait to greet you in

The Story with a Punch!

Virile—vivid—gripping. Never before published

At all bookstores—$2.00

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

Reduced
Fac-Simile

Grand Prix.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made **self-adhesive** purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered. **Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive.** Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We **prove** it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**

Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY**

PLAPAO CO. 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name ....
Address..
Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.....................

The New Dances

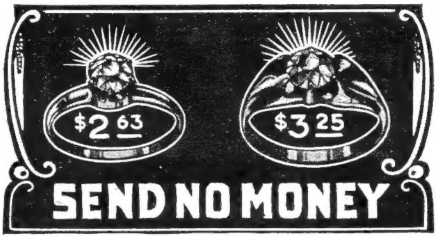
Learned in One Evening by Arthur Murray's New Easy Picture Method.

Let the Vanderbilts' instructor teach you to be a *good* dancer. Learn the latest steps by Arthur Murray's remarkable *new* picture method; surprisingly *easy* and *fascinating*—you need no music or partner. "*60,000 taught dancing by mail.*" You, too, can learn at home, privately, in a few hours.

FREE DANCING LESSON

One lesson (in plain wrapper) absolutely free to prove I can make you an accomplished dancer *quickly!* HALF PRICE OFFER ON NOW! For mailing, send 10c *today!*

ARTHUR MURRAY, Studio 90, 290 Broadway, N.Y.



If You Can Tell it from a GENUINE DIAMOND Send it back

To prove our blue-white MEXICAN DIAMOND cannot be told from a GENUINE DIAMOND and has same DAZZLING RAINBOW FIRE, we will send a selected 1 carat gem in ladies Solitaire Ring, (Cat. price $5.26) for **Half Price to Introduce, $2.63,** or in Gents Heavy Tooth Belcher Ring (Cat. Price $6.50) for **$3.25.** Our finest 12k Gold Filled mountings. GUARANTEED 20 YEARS SEND NO MONEY. Just mail postcard or this ad. State Size. We will mail at once. When ring arrives deposit $2.63 for Ladies ring or $3.25 for Gents with postman. If not pleased return in 2 days for money back less handling charges. Write for **Free** catalog. **Agents Wanted.**

MEXICAN DIAMOND IMPORTING CO., Dept. A E, Las Cruces, N. Mex.
(*Exclusive controllers Mexican Diamonds*)

For 57 years these little marchers have led band instrument buyers to better quality and value!

FREE—84-Page BAND CATALOG

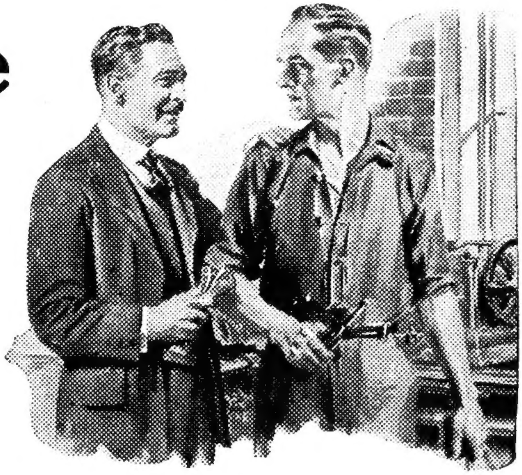
Pictures, describes, prices everything for the band—from single instrument to complete equipment. Used by Army and Navy. Sold by leading music merchants everywhere. *Free trial.* Easy payments. State instrument interested in. Write for Book today!

LYON & HEALY, 72-91 Jackson Blvd., CHICAGO

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG

We revise poems, write music and guarantee to secure publication. Submit poems on any subject. BROADWAY STUDIOS, 268 Fitzgerald Building, Broadway at 43d Street, New York.

How "Modest Jim" Won the $50 Prize



By William Lawrence

Author of "The Awakening"

"YES—I remember why they call the Big Boss 'Modest Jim,'" said the Old Timer. "It started way back twenty years ago.

"I was in my third apprentice year when Jim Hadley came to work here—a quiet, bashful boy. His father had died and he was forced to leave grammar school and go to work.

"He was never among the groups of boys dodging the boss or watching the clock nor mixed up in anything that wasn't strictly business. And he never fooled away his time with the bunch after hours, so we left him pretty much to himself. We called him 'Modest Jim.'

"One day Old Man Adams, who owned this outfit in those days, came out into the shop and tacked up a sign over the foreman's desk.

"It seemed that the Old Man and his designer had run into a stone wall or what was Greek to most of us kids those days, and was offering a prize of fifty dollars to anyone who solved the problem. He must have been up against it or he never would have asked our bunch for help.

"About two weeks later, after the rest of us had forgotten all about it, the Old Man rushed out to Jim and fairly pushed five crisp ten dollar bills into his hand. He had solved the problem.

"When the foreman asked him how he did it, he replied, 'Oh, it wasn't anything great. Only a fresh brain on a stale subject.' That's all he ever said about it. But do you know what that boy had been doing? He'd been studying with the International Correspondence Schools in his spare time. No wonder he got ahead!

"And he went right up, and up and up, until today he is the Big Boss. And the rest of us are just about where we started. He's still 'Modest Jim,' but he's earning five times as much as I am.

"Take my advice, lad, and follow along in Jim's footsteps. Don't wait until it's too late to get the special training that is so essential to success."

Employers everywhere are looking for men like "Modest Jim"—men who want to get ahead—who are willing to devote a part of their spare time to training for advancement.

How much longer are *you* going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you a better job and more money?

Isn't it better to make your start now than to wait a year or five years and then wish you had? It certainly is!

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. lessons make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. courses will surely suit your needs.

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2026-C SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting & Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEM'T
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Show Card & Sign Ptg.
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Correspondent
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer & Typist
- ☐ Certified Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILES
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ BANKING
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Teacher

Name...

7 1-21

Street and No...

City.................................... State....................................

Occupation...

Don't Choke your Legs

MAKE sure of comfort in a pair of E. Z. Garters that never bind or slip. The wide, soft webbing "gives" to every movement of the leg. It holds snugly—not because it is tight, but because it fits the leg. No bothersome adjustments to "dig" the leg.

Whether in the office or on an outing you will appreciate a garter that gives fair play to veins and muscles.

The genuine has "E. Z." stamped on the Garter; made solely by

The Thos. P. Taylor Co. Bridgeport, Conn.

E. Z.
EZ
Wide for Comfort
GARTER

Free Book

Containing complete story of the origin and history of that wonderful instrument—the

SAXOPHONE

Easy to Play Easy to Pay

This book tells you when to use Saxophone—singly, in quartettes, in sextettes, or in regular band; how to transpose cello parts in orchestra and many other things you would like to know.

You can learn to play the scale in one hour's practice, and soon be playing popular airs. You can double your income, your pleasure, and your popularity. **Easy to pay** by our easy payment plan.

MAKES AN IDEAL PRESENT

Send for free saxophone book and catalog of everything in True-Tone band and orchestra instruments.

BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO. 684 Buescher Block, Elkhart, Ind.

Don't Wear a Truss

MR. C. E. BROOKS

Brooks' Appliance, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that relieves rupture, will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads.

Brooks' Rupture Appliance

Has automatic Air Cushions. Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb. No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Protected by U. S. patents. Catalog and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO., 212F State St., Marshall, Mich.

HOMER D. MINOR
Texas

"Six months after I started my magazine subscription work I cleared over $1,000.00. My business increased over one thousand per cent. last year."

$100.00

a year in interest!

During 1921, Homer D. Minor, of Texas, earned more than $2,500.00 through magazine subscription work. At the end of 1922 he will point with pride to an increase of **$100.00** in his bank balance. His interest alone assures him of that much. He should also earn at least $2,500.00 additional. Keeping a close check on his renewals is a positive guarantee of that amount not only in 1922 but in every year he is active.

If you, too, want to build up a permanent business of your own in your spare time, become a subscription representative for *Adventure*, *Everybody's*, *The Delineator* and *The Designer*. They represent a magazine service which will appeal to all prospects. If you are anxious to have an independent, substantial income by simply satisfying the unlimited demand which already exists for these four popular magazines, let me know.

No experience is necessary. You incur no expense or obligation. A complete representative's outfit and all instructions and information will be sent promptly on receipt of your request. Act immediately.

— — — — —MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY— — — — — —

Manager, Staff Agencies Division
Box 796, Butterick Bldg., New York

DEAR SIR:

Please send me immediately, without obligation, all particulars concerning your practical plan to build up a permanent, profitable magazine subscription business of my own in my spare time.

Name..

Address..

City.. *State*..................................

Free Proof That I Can Raise Your Pay

No matter how much you are earning now, I can show you how to increase it. I have even taken failures and shown them how to make, each week, $100, $200, and in many cases even more. I am willing to prove this entirely at my risk and expense.

LET'S have a little chat about getting ahead—you and I. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches.

I'm no genius—far from it. I'm just a plain, everyday, unassuming sort of man. I've looked black despair in the eye—had failure stalk me around and hoodoo everything I did. But today all is different. I have money and all of the things that money will buy. I am rich also in the things that money won't buy—health, happiness and friendship.

It was a simple thing that jumped me up from poverty to riches. As I've said, I'm no genius. But I had the good fortune to know a genius. One day this man told me a "secret." He said that every wealthy man knew this "secret"—that is why he was rich.

I used the "secret." It surely had a good test. At that time I was flat broke. I had about given up hope when I put the "secret" to work. At first I couldn't believe my sudden change in fortune. Money actually flowed in on me. Things I couldn't do before became easy for me. My business boomed ahead. Prosperity became my partner. Since that day I've never known what it is to want for money, friendship, happiness, health or any of the good things of life. That "secret" surely made me rich in every sense of the word.

My sudden rise to riches naturally surprised others. People asked me how I did it. I told them. And it worked for them as well as it did for me.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it, barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth $200,000. He has built a $25,000 home—and paid cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

I could tell you hundreds of similar instances. But there's no need to do this, as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you.

I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has little chance of attaining success. Yet the will, altho heretofore almost entirely neglected, can be trained into a wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer.

Send No Money

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book, "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over, mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over five hundred thousand others—send me only $3.00 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by I'll be out only the small profit on a $3.00 sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

A. L. PELTON
PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
48-F Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

A. L. PELTON
PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
48-F Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit $3.00 or remail the book to you in five days.

Name ....

Address..

....

More Proof

Made $500 in Five Days

"In five days' time it has made me $500. And I have other profitable things in sight."—G. C. Bennington, Centerton, O.

Worth $15,000 and More

"The book has been worth more than $15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard.

Would Be Worth $100,000

"If I had only had it when I was twenty years old, I would be worth $100,000 today. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milano, Texas.

Salary Jumped from $150 to $800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from $150 to $800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

From $100 to $3,000 a Month

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month, and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in the State."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

Worth $3,000 to $30,000

"From what I have already seen I believe I can get $3,000 to $30,000 worth of good out of it."—C. D. Van Vechten, Gen. Agent, Northwestern Life Insurance Co., Cedar Rapids, Ia.

$897.00 Profit First Week

"'Power of Will' is a compilation of mighty forces. My first week's benefit in dollars is $900—cost, $3.00; profit, $897.00."—(Figure what his yearly profit would be.)—F. W. Heistand, 916 Tribune Bldg., Chicago, Illinois.

Another 50% Increase

"More than a year ago I purchased 'Power of Will' and I firmly believe that it—and it alone—has enabled me to increase my salary more than 50 per cent in that time."—L. C. Hudgens, Boswell, Okla.

Among over 500,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben. B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster-Gen. Britt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, Former Vice-Pres. Art Metal Construction Co.; Ex-Gov. Ferris of Michigan, and many others of equal prominence.

BUY TODAY

10 MONTHS TO PAY

SPECIAL VALUE

Sweet's Cluster

7 Fine Diamonds set in Platinum. Looks like 1½ carat solitaire.

Only $3.80 a month

SPECIAL TERMS—Ten months' credit on any article selected from the SWEET catalogue. **NO MONEY IN ADVANCE.** Shipment made for your examination. First payment to be made only after you have convinced yourself that **SWEET** values cannot be equalled. If not what you wish return at our expense.

No Red Tape—No Delay

Every transaction CONFIDENTIAL. You don't do justice to yourself and your dollars unless you inspect our unusual values in Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry, Silverware, Leather Goods, etc. Send TODAY for SWEET De Luxe Catalogue. Write NOW. to **Dept. 302-H.**

Capital $1,000,000

"THE HOUSE OF QUALITY"

L·W·SWEET INC.

1650-1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

Help Wanted

We require the services of an ambitious person to do some special advertising work right in your own locality. The work is pleasant and dignified. Pay is exceptionally large. No previous experience is required, as all that is necessary is a willingness on your part to carry out our instructions.

If you are at present employed, we can use your spare time in a way that will not interfere with your present employment—yet pay you well for your time.

If you are making less than $150 a month, the offer I am going to make will appeal to you. Your spare time will pay you well—your full time will bring you in a handsome income.

It costs nothing to investigate. Write me today and I will send you full particulars by return mail and place before you the facts so that you can decide for yourself.

ALBERT MILLS, Gen. Manager, Employment Dept.
6609 American Bldg., CINCINNATI, OHIO

An Easy Way to Remove Dandruff

If you want plenty of thick, beautiful, glossy, silky hair, do by all means get rid of dandruff, for it will starve your hair and ruin it if you don't.

The best way to get rid of dandruff is to dissolve it. To do this, just apply a little Liquid Arvon at night before retiring; use enough to moisten the scalp, and rub it in gently with the finger tips.

By morning, most, if not all, of your dandruff will be gone, and three or four more applications should completely remove every sign and trace of it.

You will find, too, that all itching of the scalp will stop, and your hair will look and feel a hundred times better. You can get Liquid Arvon at any drug store. A four-ounce bottle is usually all that is needed.

The R. L. Watkins Co., Cleveland, Ohio

Name Your Own Price For Your Spare Time!

Just say what you want for a few hours spare time —$15, $25, $50 a week? You can have it! Act as our representative in your vicinity.

As our representative you can accept subscriptions for ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER—four magazines in popular demand everywhere. They give you a ready-made introduction to every prospect and render it easy for you to *monopolize* the new and renewal magazine subscriptions of your friends and neighbors.

No experience is necessary. All supplies, instructions and information will be furnished you absolutely free of charge. And, from the very beginning, we will pay you liberal commissions and regular monthly salary bonuses. Use the coupon below TODAY. It will bring you all particulars right away.

CLIP OUT—MAIL TODAY

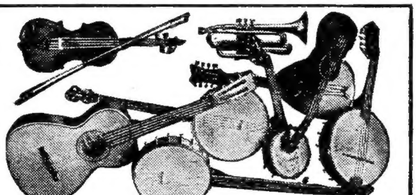
Manager, Staff Agencies Division
Box 797, Butterick Bldg., New York

DEAR SIR—Please send me, without obligation, all particulars concerning your practical money-making plan.

Name ....

Street ....

City .... *State* ....



FREE PROFESSIONAL TONE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

and lessons sent on free trial. Violin, Tenor Banjo, Hawaiian Guitar, Ukulele, Mandolin, Cornet, Banjo Mandolin, Banjo Ukulele, Guitar, Banjo Guitar, or Banjo. Wonderful new copyrighted system of teaching note music by mail. Four lessons will teach you several pieces. Over 100,000 successful players. Do not miss this **free** trial offer. Write for booklet. No obligations.

SLINGERLAND SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Inc.,
1815 Orchard Street, Dept. 129, Chicago, Illinois

What do people think of your little mistakes in English

Do You say, "I would like", for "I should like", "I think I will", for "I think I shall"? You utter countless expressions every day that are not only embarrassing but inexcusable. A complete command of English is the greatest asset anyone can have. Now easy to speak and write perfect English. The new way tells how. No need to thumb thru dry text books. Fascinating new method quickly makes you a master of English. Josephine Turck Baker, famous world authority on English for 23 years, solves the problem for you. Her text books and "Correct English Magazine" have been used in schools, universities and business houses, since 1899. Now her knowledge is placed within easy reach of everyone who wishes to speak and write correctly. Her course is simple, concise, and complete. You can with a few minutes study each day, by yourself, acquire perfect command of English and enlarge your vocabulary. Write for complete free information. Learn how Josephine Turck Baker can and will quickly improve your English. Address. Correct English School, Department 33, Evanston, Illinois.

Adventure
Registered in U. S. Patent Office
March 30 1922
Vol XXXIII No 6

Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President
C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance

Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1922, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for March 30th, 1922, Issue

The Spark of Skeeter Bill *A Complete Novelette* . . . . **W. C. Tuttle** 3
West—the horse-thief who would not lie.

The Cook . . . . **Frederick Moore** 34
Tangeru—jungle law.

The Crocodile's Bride . . . . **Santie Sabalala** 43
South Africa—magic in the kraals.

The Cowman's Five Senses *Poem* . . . . . . **Allen Lee Haase** 49

A Son of Strife *A Three-Part Story* *Part I* . . . . . **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 50
Palestine—war on the Saracens.

Boone Helm—Bad Man *A Bit of the Old West* . . . **E. A. Brininstool** 87

Intuition . . . . **Henry Leverage** 88
Australasia—shanghaied—and glad of it.

Sea Gulls *Poem* . . . . **Glenn Ward Dresbach** 96

The Smilin' Kid . . . . **John Joseph** 97
Eastern Oregon—quick-draw gun-play.

The Land of Ophir *A Three-Part Story* *Conclusion* . . . . **Charles Beadle** 105
The Sudan—the arena of the pythons.

Medicines, Big and Otherwise *A Bit of the Far East* . . . **Harold Lamb** 132

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

Hunger Mad . . . . **F. St. Mars** 133
The North—wild cats, ermine, wolves, minx, swans, eagles—and Nature.

The Leg of Moose Bill . . . . **Wilbur Watkins** 136
Alaska—the price of wet moccasins.

The Fenceless Meadows *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Bill Adams** 142
A ship—and perils of the sea.

Incense *Poem* . . . . **Sherman Ripley** 174

The Camp-Fire A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers 175

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 183

Ask Adventure 184

Weapons, Past and Present 185

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 186

Fishing in North America 186

Mountains and Mountaineering 186

Lost Trails 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **John R. Neill**

Cover Design . . . . **E. D. Weldon**

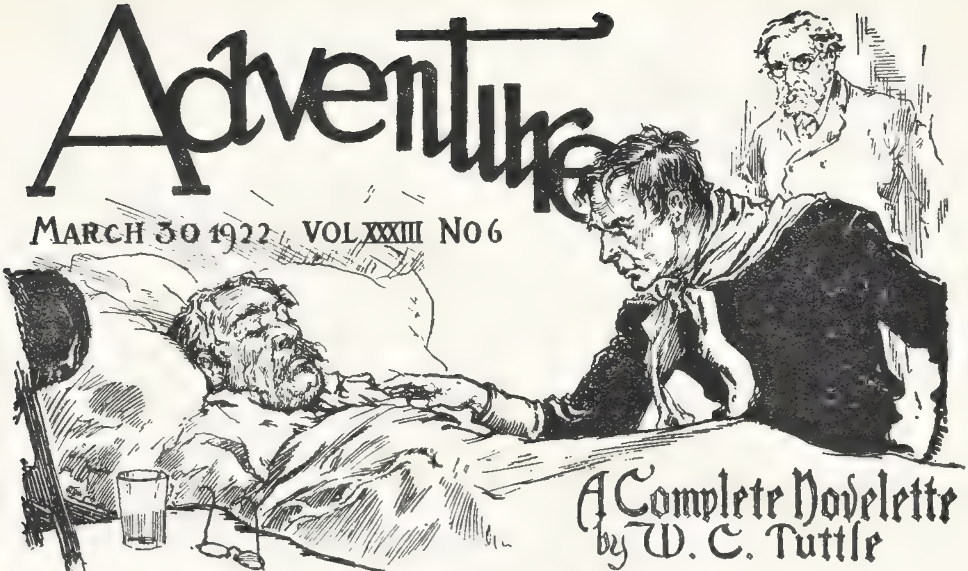
THE South Sea story, which first appeared in *Adventure* in 1912 and gained immense popularity, was revised and enlarged by the author prior to his death. "BRETHREN OF THE BEACH," by H. D. Couzens, the tale of a struggle for a treasure of pearls, is the complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

**Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—
the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure

MARCH 30 1922 VOL XXXIII NO 6



A Complete Novelette
by W. C. Tuttle

The Spark of Skeeter Bill

Author of "Law Rustlers," "Wise Men and a Mule," etc.

"SKEETER BILL" SARG stopped at the door of his tar-paper and lath shack and looked back at the street. Skeeter was cranelike in his proportions, his long legs were slightly bowed and his skinny hands hung well below his thighs. He was one of those solemn-looking individuals whose faces appear on the verge of either laughter or tears.

Just now he seemed undetermined. He rubbed a skinny hand across his chin, spoke softly to himself and went into the house. It was a small shack. A broken mirror hung crookedly from the wall, a broken-top table was littered with dirty dishes. On a bunk, built into a corner of the room, sat a man of undeterminate age. His face was frowsy with gray stubble, his gray hair straggling down over his ears and turning up from his collar at the back of his neck.

The man was of powerful frame, but whisky and the lack of ambition had turned him into a gross, greasy figure, bellied and jowled like a hog. In his hands he held a worn volume. Across the bridge of his nose rested a pair of steel-bowed spectacles, one of the lenses missing.

Skeeter shut the door carefully and sat down on a broken chair. The fat man looked at Skeeter, squinting one eye shut and looking through the empty circle of steel.

"What cheer, Skeeter?" The fat man's voice was well modulated, although husky from continual libations.

Skeeter shifted his cartridge-belt to bring the holstered gun across his lap. He rolled a cigaret slowly and thoughtfully before he replied.

"I killed Jeff Billings a while ago, judge."

"Ah!"

Judge Tareyton closed his book softly and removed his glasses. He polished the lenses with a once-clean handkerchief, unmindful of the fact that one lens was missing. He replaced them, polished to his satisfaction, astride his nose.

"Killed Jeff Billings, eh? A pity and still a blessing, Skeeter Bill. It has been brought to my notice that Billings was very instantaneous with a gun. My congratulations."

"It was a even break," said Skeeter slowly.

"Brought about, no doubt, by what was done last night."

"He lied," said Skeeter simply.

"Yes," nodded the judge. "Yes, he would do that. I fear that Mr. Billings was a dishonest horse-thief. Mr. Leeds

Copyright, 1922, by the Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

will be very much annoyed, Skeeter Bill."

Skeeter nodded and reached for his tobacco. Came a tap on the door. Skeeter dropped his hand to his lap and turned to face the door.

"Come in," called the judge.

The door opened, disclosing a scar-faced cowboy with one empty eye-socket. He squinted at Skeeter for a moment and then:

"Leeds wants to see yuh, Sarg. He's in his room now."

"All right, Mears," said Skeeter, getting slowly to his feet. "I'll go with yuh."

NO ONE seemed to know why this town was called Sunbeam. It was located on the summit of Cholo Pass, on the old trail to Ophir. A year before there had been nothing but a log-cabin; but gold had been found in the gulches—gold in abundance. Like magic had sprung the town—a town of false-fronted saloons, gambling-houses, honkatonks.

The old pack-trail became a deep rutted road, over which toiled freighters, gold-seekers and the riffraff which infest a place where money comes easy.

Men sang and fought as men always sing and fight, where riches come without the mark of the mint. Twenty miles away was the cow-country, sans cowpunchers, for the chaps-clad sons of the range were rubbing elbows with prospectors in a frenzied search for gold.

But the song of gold reached beyond, and caravans of treasure-hunters, like the Argonauts of old, headed for the fabled land of Sunbeam. New ground was opened every day and men who had never earned better than a dollar a day now bought chips at a hundred dollars a throw and laughed derisively when it was swept away.

Into this country came the "Sticky-Rope" gang, a crew of cattle-rustlers who had lately transferred their affections to "lifting" horses and gold shipments. "Tug" Leeds controlled this gang, planning the coups, disposing of the stolen stock.

Skeeter Bill Sarg joined this gang. Skeeter's reputation had preceded him, and Leeds was glad to add him to the crew. Leeds had planned to steal the clean-up from the Solomon Mine, which turned out as planned, except that "Kid" Sisler and "Blondy" Jones, two of the gang, had been killed. Skeeter got no split of the gold, but narrowly escaped being killed when two shots were fired at him in the dark.

A hue and cry had been raised over the robbery. The Solomon men swore that it amounted to twenty thousand dollars, but Jeff Billings, Leeds' right-hand man, swore that the sacks only contained black sand. The Sticky-Ropes had been hoaxed. Skeeter did not believe this; he believed that Leeds and Billings had double-crossed him after trying to kill him.

Skeeter and Billy Mears crossed the street and went into the Panhandle Saloon, the headquarters of Tug Leeds. Men looked at Skeeter, but made no remarks. The whole town knew that Skeeter had killed Jeff Billings in a fair draw, and Billings was reputed to be as swift and deadly as a rattler.

Mears stopped at the bar, but Skeeter went through the crowd and up to the door of a rear room, where he knocked once and stepped inside.

The room was evidently part office, part bedroom. In the center was a heavy table. The walls were covered with sporting pictures, cut from a well-known yellow weekly. In one corner stood a rumpled bed, with clothing hanging to the foot-posts.

Sitting at the table was a big, black-bearded man. His hard, pig-like eyes were barely visible through the surrounding puffiness at the bottom and the heavy thatched brows above. His nose flared at the nostrils, hinting of negro blood, and his thick lips appeared swollen and cracked.

As Skeeter came in, Leeds got to his feet, disclosing the fact that his trousers were too small around the waist, and one would expect momentarily to hear the snap of a defeated button or the ripping of overwrought woolen.

Leeds glanced down at the Colt pistol on the table top and then at Skeeter, who was watching narrowly. To Sarg, Tug Leeds was merely a fat animal. He wondered why men obeyed Leeds—feared him. Sarg did not fear Leeds. In fact, Skeeter Bill Sarg feared no man. Leeds did not know this, for to him, Sarg was merely a rebellious hired-man. Leeds removed a half-chewed cigar from his lips.

"You shot Jeff Billings?"

Skeeter nodded indifferently.

"Why?" Leeds spat the question, as he leaned across the table, shoving his set jaw close to Skeeter's face. But Skeeter merely smiled and replied softly—

"Billings lied."

"Lied?" gasped Leeds.

It was preposterous. Leeds gawped around the room, as if asking the inanimate sporting celebrities to make note of such a foolish reason. His eyes came back to Skeeter.

"You killed him because he lied?"

"Uh-huh," indifferently.

Leeds chewed viciously on his cigar, studying the lanky cowpuncher.

"What did he lie about, Sarg?"

"You ought to know," meaningly. "You told him what to say, Leeds."

Leeds' face flushed purple and his hand twitched toward the gun on the table, but stopped. Skeeter was watching that hand, a half-smile on his lips.

"Go ahead," grinned Skeeter. "Yo're old enough to know what yuh want to do with yo're own skin."

Leeds tried to laugh, but it caught in his throat and he coughed hoarsely.

"I told Jeff to lie to you? Why should I want him to lie to you, Sarg?"

"To save yuh money. Billings packed that Solomon clean-up to yuh, while me and Blondy and the Kid blocked them miners. I hefted that sack m'self, Leeds. Them miners never killed Blondy and the Kid, and it wasn't no miner what shot at me on Little Boy Trail. Billings said there wasn't nothin' but black sand in them sacks."

Leeds licked his lips and shook his head.

"Them miners must 'a' got Blondy and the Kid, Sarg. I never hired nobody to shoot at you."

"You ain't spoke about the clean-up," reminded Skeeter.

Leeds shook his head.

"No, I ain't. You've made up your mind that we lied to you, and you're bull-headed about it. Them miners foxed us, don't yuh know it?"

Skeeter Bill smiled and shook his head. He knew that Leeds was lying. No doubt Leeds had all of that cleanup and intended keeping it.

"Look here," said Leeds. "Billings is gone and I need a man to take his place. Let's me and you talk turkey."

Skeeter shook his head.

"Nope. If I took Billings' place I'd have to lie, and I won't lie to nobody. *Sabe?*"

Leeds removed his cigar and stared open-mouthed.

"Well, my ——, what if you do have to lie? Is lying any worse than stealin' horses or stickin' up a stage or a bank?"

"There ain't nothin' worse'n lyin'," stated Skeeter seriously. "Robbin' banks or stages or liftin' broncs is just a kind of a livin', but lyin'—yuh can't trust nobody what tells lies, Leeds."

"You'd be a good man for the job," insisted Leeds.

"No-o-o," drawled Skeeter. "I won't lie for you nor anybody else. I don't need to split with you nor any other horse-thief. I work alone after this. I was fool enough to work for you, and I got lied to and robbed."

Skeeter stepped in closer and leaned across the desk.

"You're a dirty, lyin' coyote, Leeds! You and your pack of sidewinders can go to ——! I work alone; *sabe?*"

"Work alone, will yuh?" Leeds snarled like an animal. "No, yuh don't, Sarg! Sunbeam belongs to me, and what I says goes. You get that —— drunken lawyer pardner of yours and vamoose. I'll give yuh—" Leeds seemed to choke with wrath—"I'll give yuh five hours to git out of range."

Sarg laughed. In fact he grew convulsed with mirth, while Leeds panted and spluttered. It was too much. Leeds flung himself on to the table, clawing for the gun, but Skeeter's open palm caught him on the ear and shoved him off his balance so that he crashed to the floor.

Came a knock at the door, and a man entered. He stopped and looked at the tableau inquiringly. Leeds got slowly to his feet, his face very white, and faced the man. The man nodded to Skeeter, then turned to Leeds.

"Palo just come in, Leeds. He said there's a four-wagon outfit due to hit Poplar Springs tonight. Four on each wagon and a couple of extras. Palo says they's only enough men to handle the teams."

Leeds nodded, seemingly unable to speak. The man sensed the enmity between Leeds and Skeeter, but continued—

"Palo says the stock looks good."

Leeds nodded again and spoke.

"Send the boys to me as fast as they come in. Billings died this afternoon."

"Died? How—killed?"

"Lied himself to death," drawled Skeeter.

The man stared at Skeeter and then at Leeds.

"I'll tell the boys to come here," he said nervously, and went out the door.

"The boys liked Billings," offered Leeds.

"A hawg acts just like it cared for swill," observed Skeeter, "but yuh can't blame the hawg, can yuh? Hawgs will foller the swill-bucket to —— and back, but it ain't 'cause they loves the man who is packin' it. You've got a lot of hawgs workin' for yuh, Leeds, but yore head swill-packer is missin'. They ain't got brains enough to dig deeper than the slop from yore table."

"Will you take Billings' place?"

"No!"

"By ——, you'll wish you had!" roared Leeds.

Skeeter stopped with his back against the door, his thumb hooked over his belt.

"Leeds, do you know anythin' about God? anythin' except to use His name when yuh need a cuss-word?"

"No!" snapped Leeds. "I suppose you do."

"Yo're supposin' wrong, Leeds. 'Pears to me that I'd have to know a feller pretty well to use his name thataway. Kinda sounds too much like yuh was usin' another man's name to revile somebody with. *Adios*."

SARG softly closed the door behind him and went back through the saloon. Men looked curiously at him, but he gave them no heed. He knew all of Leeds' gang, knew that none of them would shoot him in the back until ordered to do so. It was plain that Leeds had figured it would take five hours to get his men together, and Skeeter knew that Leeds would never allow him to work alone in the Sunbeam country.

Sunbeam had little attraction for Skeeter Bill, but he greatly disliked having any one man govern his actions. Skeeter walked between two buildings and headed for his own shack. Leeds had ordered him to take his partner with him—his drunken lawyer partner. Skeeter smiled grimly. If he went away it was a certainty that Judge Tareyton would go with him.

A year or so prior to this time, in a Southwest town, Skeeter had been arrested for robbing a stage. Knowing that the evidence was all against him, he refused counsel. The court offered a legal adviser, but Skeeter refused. Since his arrest he had talked to no one regarding his innocence or guilt.

In that tiny court-room Skeeter bowed his head to the inevitable as the prosecution flayed him alive. Then from the center of the room arose "Judge" Tareyton, a half-drunk, frowsy looking man. In courteous, legal phrases he asked the court to let him defend Skeeter Bill.

Skeeter made no comment. The prosecution, confident in its might, acquiesced. Then, without questioning the defendant, this half-drunk person plunged into the case, harrying witnesses, tearing down the prosecution, while the audience left their chairs that they might not miss a point. It took an intelligent jury five minutes to bring in a verdict of "Not guilty."

Skeeter, dazed from the trial, met his lawyer on the street and asked him to have a drink. Judge Tareyton, just a little more intoxicated, drew up in dignity and replied—

"Sir, I never drink with a road-agent."

Skeeter took the rebuke in silence, while the judge became even more dignified and walked on. Skeeter did not feel hurt, because Skeeter had been born with, and had developed, a certain degree of humor.

On the following morning, in an attempted stage robbery, the bandit was shot and killed. He fitted the description of the robber whose crime had been fitted to Skeeter.

Judge Tareyton found Skeeter and in flowery language expressed his desire to retract his former words. He fairly abased himself, while Skeeter, his eyes dancing, accepted the apology. The judge concluded:

"Sir, I have apologized from my heart for what I have said and thought. It is with extreme pleasure that I accept your invitation of yesterday."

"Think I wasn't guilty?" asked Skeeter.

"By gad, sir, I know you were not!"

"You're crazy as ——," grinned Skeeter. "I was."

For a moment the judge stared blankly at Skeeter. His left hand rubbed slowly at his stubbly chin. Finally his right hand extended, and Skeeter took it.

"A gentleman," said the judge softly. "A gentleman, by gad, sir! You may be guilty of everything in the criminal code, but your veracity brands you as a gentleman. I still accept your invitation—proudly, sir."

Skeeter drank water, which amazed the judge and almost insulted the town. The prosecutor, still stinging from Judge Tareyton's defense, and being somewhat of a fire-eater, decided that the town was too small to hold himself and the judge. The prosecutor had a number of friends, whom he enlisted in his behalf.

Skeeter, being cold-sober, managed to drag the judge from the center of a bloody brawl, loaded him on the night stage, wheel was by no means ready to depart, and sat behind the driver, forcing him to gallop his team out of town. Judge Tareyton, the lone passenger, bounced from side to side in the swaying vehicle, trying to stanch the blood from a knife-wound and to drink from a corked bottle at the same time.

The next morning at a stage-station, the judge, very painfully and indignantly, asked Skeeter what in —— he meant by interfering with his affairs.

"Gittin' even with yuh," explained Skeeter. "You ain't worth much to me, but I reckon your life is worth quite a bit to you. You saved mine, yuh know."

"A debatable point, son," said the judge. "My life is worth nothing to any one except myself, and I've grave doubts about my own valuation of it. Have you ever considered life?"

"No."

"You are a very, very wise man, my son."

"Wise?" laughed Skeeter. "Me? If I'm wise, what are you?"

"I?" The judge rubbed his chin for a moment. "I am an educated —— fool."

"Well," said Skeeter seriously, "a feller has got to be wise to admit bein' a —— fool, I reckon."

"Wisdom is not what you learn," stated the judge, "but what you remember. I remember that we took that stage by force of arms. Knowing this and forgetting it is idiocy."

"I reckon we'll move on," nodded Skeeter. "I'm wise enough to know that a sheriff is on my trail, and you ain't goin' to be of any use to me when we're handcuffed together."

Time and the tide of events drifted them into Sunbeam. Perhaps the judge was a little frowsier, more prone to elastic morals and a bit heavier drinker, but Skeeter stuck to him.

Men tried to get Skeeter to cut loose from the drunken old lawyer, who talked in a language which none of them understood, but Skeeter shook his head and kept the judge in liquor and provender. The judge was the first human being to do Skeeter a favor, and Skeeter explained:

"He's a educated —— fool, the judge is. Says so himself, don't he? Them kinda folks has got to have somebody lookin' after 'em. No, sir, I've got to hang on to him, y' betcha. He's got to have whisky or die. Every time I buy hooch for him it's like bandagin' up a cut to keep a feller from bleedin' to death. Sure, it'll kill him after while, but I ain't noways responsible for a feller bleedin' to death internally, am I?"

JUST now, Skeeter was wondering where the judge figured in this five-hour order. He stopped for a moment at the shack door before going inside. The judge was propped up on the bed, reading. Beside the bed, on a box, was a tumbler of liquor.

The judge reached for the liquor and waited for Skeeter to speak, but Skeeter sat down and stared at the wall.

"What did Leeds have to say, Skeeter Bill?" asked the judge hoarsely.

Skeeter smiled.

"Gave me and you five hours to git out of Sunbeam."

"Five hours," mused the judge, peering at his glass. "Three hundred minutes. Long enough to depose an emperor or to go broke playing penny-ante. What then, son?"

Skeeter studied the old judge's face. There was no denying the fact that the judge had imbibed much liquor in the last few hours, but there was no suggestion of it in his eyes nor tongue.

"I dunno, judge," replied Skeeter slowly.

"Just why does Mr. Leeds desire our departure, Skeeter Bill?"

"Because I refused to stay with him and his gang. From now on I work alone. What I take I take alone, judge. I'm plumb tired of bein' one of a gang which lies and beats me out of my share. Pretty soon I'd learn to lie, too."

The judge got uncertainly to his feet and weaved over to a crude cupboard, where he secured a demijohn. He shook the jug and smiled softly as he turned.

"Skeeter Bill, I reckon you done right. Shakespeare said:

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true.
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

The judge drank deeply and staggered back to the bunk, still carrying the jug.

"Do you know Shakespeare, Skeeter Bill?"

"Don't reckon I ever met him, judge."

The judge smiled kindly and shook his head.

"No, I don't think you ever did, Skeeter Bill. He died a long time ago, but he still lives. After all it is not always what we do in life, but what we leave, that counts. I leave nothing—I think. Perhaps some day some one will say:

"'Remember old Judge Tareyton? Wasn't he an old drunken pup?' "

"Quit talkin' that away!" snapped Skeeter.

"Ah, but it is true, and the truth hurts no man. I am not expecting the end for quite some time, Skeeter Bill. No, not until I have examined the bottom of many a jug of hard liquor. I have one enemy and one friend."

"Me and the jug?" asked Skeeter.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"Rank pizen and a horse-thief, judge."

"An enemy of strength and a friend of action. Who could wish for more "

The judge blinked his eyes slowly and relaxed on the blankets. Skeeter watched him for a few minutes and then spread a blanket across his body.

"You're a —— old fool, judge," said Skeeter softly, tucking in the blanket. "You're killin' yourself by the gallon, but you're goin' to die happy."

Skeeter walked outside and went to the small barn where he kept his horse. A tall, rangy bay horse nuzzled him as he saddled it swiftly and led it outside. Far in the west a bank of thunder-heads was piling up and fitful gusts of wind presaged a coming storm.

Skeeter studied the storm for a few moments. He looked over at the shack, debating whether he should go and tell the judge what he was going to do, but shook his head. He swung into the saddle and patted the bay's neck.

"Bronc, we ain't runnin' away," he explained. "We're likely goin' to get wet, but if we're goin' to buck Leeds' outfit we'll start in by beatin' him to them horses at Poplar Springs. Leeds owes us, and we're goin' to collect."

He turned and rode past his shack, headed for the desert.

The cowboy had told Leeds of this caravan, which was due to stop at Poplar Springs that night. Here was a chance to steal sixteen horses—a good haul, as horses were in demand. But the monetary consideration was not of as much interest to Skeeter as was the chance to get even with Leeds. Skeeter had little foresight in such matters. He made no plans as to the disposition of the animals. He knew that the caravan would be guarded and that he would be bucking big odds, but Skeeter only knew that he had a definite object in view, and that was to keep Leeds' gang from stealing those horses.

II

A FEW stunted poplars and cottonwoods, showing green against the desert gray, was all that marked the Poplar Springs. A deeply rutted road wended its way between Joshua Palms, commonly known as "Dancin' Jaspers," yucca and sage.

Far to the west stretched the Thunder Mountains, black and sinister. To the east loomed the Ophir range, beyond the desert hills. To the south there was nothing but open desert.

Up this winding road came a string of four covered wagons, four horses hitched to each wagon, creaking through the desert sand. The wind bellowed the canvas covers until they appeared as small balloons, threatening to break from their moorings.

The lead team swung out of the rut and headed for the green trees. The rest of the wagons followed, swinging in a circle, until the lead team almost nosed the end-gate of the rear wagon. Teams were quickly unhitched and unharnessed. Ropes were strung from wagon to wagon, making an effectual horse corral. Fires were built and preparations were made for the evening meal. All of the men, with one exception, were strangers in the country, but most of them looked capable.

Rance Williams, a tall, gaunt, desert man, was driving the lead team, and now was inspecting the rope and wagon corral and ordering the distribution of horse-feed.

A small, white-haired man, timid of manner, came up to him and Rance Williams turned from tying a rope.

"Howdy, parson. How yuh standin' the trip?"

"As well as could be expected," replied the small man. "It is unpleasant at times, but a messenger of God must not complain of discomforts, Mr. Williams."

Williams looks down at him and smiled.

"Yore packin' a message to folks what won't *sabe* it, old-timer. Sunbeam ain't receptive to yore kind of cheerfulness."

A girl came from between the wagons near them and stood looking off across the desert. She was a tired-looking girl with a tangle of brown hair, which she brushed nervously away as the wind flung it into her eyes.

"Evenin', miss," said Williams kindly.

"Good evening, Mr. Williams," she replied, turning toward them. "You also, Dr. Weston. Will we ever get out of this eternal desert?"

"Tomorrow, miss. Sunbeam is about twelve miles away, but it's a long twelve miles. I reckon the men what measured it used a rubber tape."

The girl smiled and went on toward the fires. The two men watched her go away and Williams turned to the minister.

"Too danged bad she's goin' to Sunbeam. I tried to argy her out of it, but she won't listen to me."

"I shall look out for her," replied the minister.

Williams looked at the rolling storm clouds for a moment and then back at the frail-looking man beside him.

"Lemme tell yuh somethin', old-timer; you ain't never been in Sunbeam. You've done all yore sky-pilotin' in a place where a policeman would arrest yuh if yuh yelped after nine o'clock at night. Sunbeam's raw —raw as ——. Know what I mean? If one moral thought weighed a ton, yuh wouldn't find enough in this country to fill a .22 ca'tridge with. Yuh mean right, parson, but Gawd help yuh both if yuh get off on the wrong foot."

The Reverend Josiah Weston shifted his feet uneasily. He did not understand this rough, kindly man at all. What could be the danger in Sunbeam, and what did he mean by "getting off on the wrong foot?"

"What is this danger, Mr. Williams?"

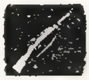
"She's a dead open-and-shut that Sunbeam don't hanker fer gospel, but they do admire a pretty face. Bein' hated is just about as dangerous as bein' desired. I reckon I better anchor some of this outfit before the storm hits us. Kinda looks like she was goin' to come a-whoopin' "

Williams turned, ducked under a rope and disappeared. Dr. Weston walked slowly back to the camp-fires. He was an old man—old in the service of the church, possessor of a snug berth, but had given it up to carry the gospel into the dim places. This was his first pilgrimage, and his old body ached from the desert days. The country and people all seemed unreal.

He missed the respect of a silk-hatted congregation.

Men called him "Old-Timer" and cursed openly before him, without shame. When he explained his mission to Sunbeam, they laughed and advised him to get a pick and shovel and let the devil alone. One man had sent a message by him, a verbal message. It was very confidential. He asked the minister to give his love to the Honkatonk girls. The minister agreed to carry the message, and worried for fear he would forget the family name—Honkatonk. No doubt they were foreigners.

Dr. Weston walked slowly up to one of the fires, where a man was busily slicing bacon. A swirl of sand blew into the man's face and he got to his feet, cursing profanely. Dr. Weston started to remonstrate with him over his language, but just at this moment six mounted men rode around the circle of wagons and pulled up near the fires.



THEY were a rough looking crew, with rifles across their saddle-forks. Their restive horses sent the dust and sand flying as they milled around. Some of the men came from another fire, looking inquiringly at the riders.

A whirl of sand seemed to blot out the group for an instant, but above the hiss of it came Rance Williams' voice—

"Look out, men!"

The man beside Dr. Weston dropped his slab of bacon and jerked his pistol, but one of the riders swung his rifle forward, fired, and the man plunged forward to the ground. From behind a wagon came the *whang!* of a rifle, and the rider slid sidewise off his horse.

With a yell the five riders plunged forward. One of the horses struck the minister, knocking him under a wagon, where he fell, unconscious. Bullets whined above the roar of the wind. One of the riders swung down and cut a connecting rope between wagons, and with a yelp of triumph the men rode into the enclosure, cutting loose and stampeding the horses.

Out of the dust cloud loomed a rider, swinging a rope-end at a frightened horse. From the billowing top of a wagon came the snap of a gun, and the rider went down, clutching at the air. Two more men seemed to ride over him, straight for the wagon, emptying their guns into the swelling canvas as they whirled past. A riderless horse crashed into a wagon and went down.

Suddenly the storm broke in its fury, blotting out the world. A tiny light seemed to glow for an instant, as some of the campfire blew into a canvas wagon-cover. Suddenly it broke into a huge flame, as the gale caught it, and the snapping canvas seemed fairly to explode, stripping the bows like a flash and whirling away like a meteor.

A sheet of rain seemed to hurl itself at the desert, as if dashed angrily from a giant pot—a crashing downpour, a deluge. Came a blinding flash of lightning, a deafening crash of thunder—silence. The storm was over.

In a dripping wagon, the top of which had been burned away, crouching against the front end of the box, was the brown-haired girl, terrified beyond words. Under that wagon crouched Dr. Weston, groping blindly for an answer to the questions which seethed in his brain. He knew that he was alive, but the world seemed a vast, dripping void.

Just outside the wagon wheels lay Rance Williams, his old, seamed face toward the sky, a pistol clutched in his right hand. The gun was cocked, one chamber still loaded. He had done his best, but the odds were in favor of Leeds.

III

SKEETER BILL read the storm signs and knew that the open desert would be no place to face it; so when the whirl of wind, sand and rain arrived, he was safely ensconced in a sheltered spot. The deluge of rain cascaded past him, swishing angrily from the protecting cliff.

He had no idea that Leeds' men had visited the Poplar Springs camp. Skeeter had barely left the Panhandle Saloon, when five of the men had ridden into town. Mears, the one-eyed outlaw, sent them to Leeds, and the six of them had ridden out just ahead of Skeeter.

Leeds had also issued an order against Skeeter Bill and judge Tareyton, but the outlaws thought more of gain than of settling Leeds' personal quarrels; so they proceeded to relegate the Skeeter Bill business to some future date.

Skeeter Bill watched the storm volley down across the desert and then rode away from the cliff and back to the road. The deep ruts were gone—wiped out by the whirling sands, and nothing was left of the road to mark the highway to Sunbeam.

Velvet blackness followed the storm, but the clouds soon broke and a pale, early moon shed a ghostly light over the desert. The Dancin' Jaspers, the gargoyles of the desert, weird in the blue haze, danced their ghostly measures, beckoning with their gnarled, agonized-like branches, throwing out long shadows, which advanced and retreated, giving one the illusion that the moon also danced.

But Skeeter Bill paid no attention to the illusions of nature as he rode steadily toward the Poplar Springs.

He planned nothing in advance, trusting to circumstances and swift action to complete his business. Perhaps he could worm his way to the horses, cut them loose and stampede them into the open, where he could round them up and drive them miles away to a little pole corral.

Perhaps the wagon-train would be well guarded and drive him away, but Skeeter knew that, in case he was defeated in his purpose, it would put the train on its guard, which would also prevent Leeds' men from surprizing them.

Skeeter had made up his mind that in case he was discovered he would merely retreat. He had no desire to take the horses by force. He was a dead shot, but knew that one man, no matter how deadly with a gun, was no match for half a dozen men, who were on their guard.

Then Skeeter saw the wagons. There was no flicker of camp-fires, but Skeeter attributed this to the storm. Perhaps, he thought, they had made supper before the storm came. He secured his horse to a mesquite and went on cautiously on foot. He found the rope link between two of the wagons, and cut it. He listened closely, but could hear no voices.

"That's danged queer," he muttered aloud as he peered across the enclosure, trying to see the horses.

He walked cautiously across to the other side and halted near a wagon, the cover of which was missing. Suddenly he turned his head and glanced down at the ground. A beam of moonlight struck across the body of Rance Williams, lighting up his face and glinting from the pistol in his hand. Skeeter Bill stared at him. He knew Rance.

A sudden noise caused him to whirl around and his heart skipped a beat. Within a foot of his face was the face of a girl, peering at him from over the edge of the wagon-box. The girl's face showed white in the moonlight, a white face, with wide, frightened eyes, surrounded with a mass of wind-blown brown hair.

For several moments they stared at each other. The girl's hand came up and pushed back her hair, and the action seemed to bring Skeeter Bill from his trance.

"Excuse me all to ——, ma'am," he muttered inanely.

"Wh-what happened?" she whispered.

Skeeter Bill's gaze traveled around, taking in the body of Rance Williams. From under the wagon came a half-surpressed groan and the figure of Dr. Weston crawled out into the moonlight. He got painfully to his feet and leaned against the wagon. Skeeter Bill watched him for a moment and turned to the girl.

"When things git through happenin', mebbe I can answer your question, miss."

The old minister slowly drew a hand across his forehead and looked at Skeeter.

"I—I do not exactly understand," he murmured.

"Is that you, Dr. Weston?" asked the girl.

"I think—I—I am almost positive that I am," replied the old minister haltingly.

He moved painfully up to Skeeter and stared at him.

"I do not think I know you, sir."

"You ain't got nothin' on me, pardner," said Skeeter. "Do yuh know just what happened."

"No." Dr. Weston shook his head. "I remember that some riders came. A shot or two was fired, I think, but something seemed to strike me and I—I think that was all."

"I was in this wagon," said the girl wearily. "I think I came to get something, and the men began shooting. Then the storm—it was terrible."

Skeeter Bill walked across the enclosure and looked down at the crumpled figure of a man. It was Mears, the one-eyed outlaw. Near him lay the body of a saddled horse. Skeeter turned and went back to the wagon.

"How many folks in your party?" he asked.

"Six of us," said the girl. "There were four drivers, Dr. Weston and myself."

She climbed down from the wagon. Her clothes were drenched and the moonlight shone on her wet hair. Skeeter watched her go to the old man and take him by the arm.

"Your daddy must 'a' got bumped," observed Skeeter. "Better fix a place and let him lay down."

He helped her lead the old man back to where the fires had been, where they let him sit down on a wagon-seat, while Skeeter rebuilt the fire. Just beyond the fire lay another man. Skeeter picked him up and carried him inside the enclosure, where he placed him beside Mears. It was Jack Brent, a young outlaw.

The girl was sitting beside the old man, moodily staring into the fire, when Skeeter returned. He asked where he could find food and cooked supper in a short time. Dr. Weston's appetite had suffered considerable shock, and the girl, still dazed from the events, did not touch the food. After a long period of silence she turned to Skeeter.

"Do you know a man named Leeds?"

Skeeter slopped a cup of hot coffee on his knees, staring at her, open-mouthed.

"Leeds?" he asked wonderingly.

"Yes. A man in Pickett told me that he had heard some one from Sunbeam speak of a man named Leeds."

"Leeds," mused Skeeter aloud, recovering his composure. "Ma'am, I ain't so awful well acquainted in Sunbeam."

Skeeter refilled his cup and stared into the fire, his brow wrinkled as if in deep thought.

"Know him when yuh see him, ma'am?"

The girl shook her head.

"I do not think so. It has been fourteen years since I saw him, and I was only four years of age. I have been trying for a long time to find him."

"What did he ever do to you?" asked Skeeter.

The girl smiled.

"Nothing, except to be my father."

This time the cup of coffee missed Skeeter's knees and fell hissing into the fire.

"For ——'s sake," gasped Skeeter wide-eyed, and then quickly recovered and added, "That's the second cup I've spilled. 'Paw-Paw' Jim says that coffee's bad for nerves."

He raised the cup from the coals and wiped it on his sleeve. Dr. Weston rubbed his left shoulder and spoke to the girl.

"I am feeling much better, my dear. I seemed dazed for a while, but that has left me. You were speaking of your father, were you not I pray we shall find him for you. It is luck for us that the Good Samaritan came along, otherwise I am afraid we would suffer in our ignorance."

"Good Samaritan?" said Skeeter Bill. "Meanin' what?"

"You are a Samaritan, my friend," said the old man.

"Me?" Skeeter looked blankly at him, "I've been called a lot of names, old pardner, but that's plumb fresh. What does she mean?"

"You have never heard the story of the Good Samaritan, my son?"

"Never heard of none," admitted Skeeter.

The old minister quoted the entire parable, while Skeeter sat on his heels beside the fire, listening. At the conclusion of the tale he said:

"What do yuh reckon that there Samaritan feller was doin' along that trail? Was he—uh—say, what do yuh reckon would 'a' happened if that wounded *hombre* had been all right when he met him. Yuh got to remember that this feller didn't have nothin' left for this here Samaritan to steal; so, mebbe—I dunno."

"I do not understand your question," said the minister.

"Tha's all right," grinned Skeeter. "I do."

Skeeter got to his feet and procured a pick and a shovel from one of the wagons.

"Got to dig quite a hole, I reckon," he stated. "I ain't never buried 'em in bunches before."

The girl shuddered. It was a ghastly business. The old minister protested. It was wrong to do this. There should be the usual formalities to be observed, notification of the relatives, death certificates. Skeeter listened to their combined views on the subject.

"Yuh never took the buzzards into your figurin'. Mebbe that's the way they handles things like this back in your country, but you're here—not there, folks. Kinda wish we had a sky-pilot, though. Don't seem right to be plantin' folks without a preacher—not a lot of folks to oncet."

"I am a minister," said Dr. Weston simply.

"——" grunted Skeeter Bill, "I thought you was a medicine-man. She called yuh doctor, yuh know. 'Pears to me that them snake-hunters all died at the right place. Ain't often that a horse-thief dies handy to a preacher. I'll do the diggin' and you do the preachin', and we'll give 'em a proper start. I'll kinda look around and see how many I can collect, while you figures out what yuh can say about 'em. I dunno your outfit, except Williams. He's worth sayin' a few words about, but if you can say anythin' good about Mears or Brent it's 'cause yuh never knowed 'em."

SKEETER BILL toiled as he never toiled before. It was a man-sized job and Skeeter Bill was no horny-handed toiler, but the work must be done. Mary Leeds surprized him by coming to the open grave and standing with bowed head, while the old minister read the burial service.

It was a queer funeral service. The large open grave, with its row of bodies; the old white-haired minister, bowed over his book, while Mary Leeds knelt on the sands near him. Across the grave from them stood Skeeter Bill, a tall, gaunt figure, leaning on a shovel-handle. A tall Dancin' Jasper, shaped like a leaning cross, cast its long shadow across the pile of sand, while others seemed to dance a requiem to the souls of desert men.

Mary Leeds and the old minister turned away toward the wagons, while Skeeter Bill filled in the grave, whistling softly through his teeth. Then he tossed the shovel aside and sat down to smoke and think of Tug Leeds' daughter. It was almost unthinkable, that this girl could be the daughter of Tug Leeds, outlaw leader, murderer. Skeeter knew that Tug Leeds was a man without any morals. He handled only crooked gamblers to run his games, and his honkatonk girls were of the most vicious breeds. No, there was no redeeming features about the man. And this was his daughter.

Skeeter Bill laughed to himself, wondering what Tug would think when his daughter appeared in Sunbeam. Should he tell her who her father was? Skeeter thought it over, but decided to let her find out for herself. The old preacher—what of him?

Then Skeeter remembered that his five hours were long past. Sunbeam would be a dangerous spot for him now. Leeds had beat him to the horses, and now, if he went back to Sunbeam he would have to fight. Would he go back?

Skeeter stopped the rolling of a cigaret and stared at the ground. Hadn't Leeds said that Sunbeam belonged to him? Yes, perhaps Leeds did control the town. Then Skeeter Bill crumpled the cigaret paper between his fingers, threw up his head and laughed, laughed foolishly, but joyously.

"Dance, you crooked Jaspers!" he chuckled at the Joshua palms. "Shake yourselves! I'm goin' to make Sunbeam dance, too."

He walked swiftly back to the campfire, where Mary Leeds and the old minister were sitting. In the old man's hands was a Bible, and his soft voice came droning—

" 'And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.' "

He stopped as Skeeter Bill came up. Skeeter humped over by the fire and began rolling another cigaret.

"Do yuh believe that, parson?" asked Skeeter.

"I do believe it, my son. It is the right way."

"But do yuh foller them teachin's, parson? If somebody stole your pants, would yuh yelp for him to come back and take your coat, too?"

"I—I have never—uh—had my pants stolen."

"Wait till yuh do," smiled Skeeter Bill. "No yuh wouldn't do it, parson, and if yuh did yuh'd be loco as a shepherd. Rustlin' and robbin' wouldn't be no occupation a-tall, if them was the conditions, 'cause everybody would be takin' your pants—and I'm thinkin' you'd be kinda pant-huntin' yourself."

Mary Leeds laughed. It was ridiculous to think of the Reverend Josiah Weston stealing any one's clothes, but there was crude wisdom in Skeeter Bill's argument. The old minister smiled at Skeeter Bill, and finally they all laughed.

"I have been warned that Sunbeam may be hostile to me," said the old minister," but I am going to Sunbeam and open a church."

"You're —— right you are," agreed Skeeter warmly if profanely. "I'm backin' your play plumb across the board. Me and you are goin' to peddle gospel in Sunbeam as long as you can talk and I can shoot. Them coyotes are goin' to church; *sabe?* Sunbeam is headed for ——, and she's up to us to crack in ahead of the stampede and turn 'em back, parson. There's a lot of ring-tails in that cavvy, but me and you are goin' to run 'em till the kinks come out."

Mary Leeds and the Rev. Josiah Weston stared at him. They were unable to decipher all of his meaning, but there was no doubt of his enthusiasm.

"My son," said the old minister, "I am glad to hear you promise assistance to the cause. Have you ever been converted to any faith?"

"No," said Skeeter Bill slowly. "No, I don't reckon I have, parson, but I'm goin' to get more fun out of this than yuh could shake a stick at. Whoo-ee! If yuh get a bell, will yuh let me ring it?"

Skeeter Bill laughed and got to his feet.

"I reckon you folks can find dry beddin' in one of the wagons, can't yuh? Go to sleep and don't be scared, cause nobody is goin' to bother yuh tonight."

Skeeter turned and walked back to where he had tied his horse, and led the animal back to the fire. He took off the saddle and bridle and tied the animal to a wagon-wheel. From one of the wagons came Mary Leeds' voice—

"Good-night, tall man."

"Skeeter Bill," he called back at her laughingly.

"Good-night, my son," came the call from another wagon.

"Snore easy, parson," he replied.

IV

TUG LEEDS was as sore as a wounded grizzly. He got up from his desk and glared at the three men who had come to report of the affair at Poplar Springs. One of the men had his left arm in a dirty sling and was white-faced from suffering.

"Kid Brent was killed first," said one of the men. "We didn't look for any fight, Tug. Somebody yelped 'Look out!' and one of them campers went for a gun. I seen Mears fall off his horse, and then me and Monte smoked up the wagon where the shot comes from. About that time the storm hits us."

"—— of a fine job!" growled Tug Leeds, "Lose two of my best men, lose their horses and all we gets is eight half-worn-out work-horses."

"We done the best we could," stated the wounded outlaw. "It was blowin' and as dark as pitch, and yuh couldn't hear yourself yell. I reckon we was lucky to get as many horses as we did."

"Billings would 'a' got the whole works," said Tug. "Mears didn't have no brains."

"What was this stuff about Skeeter Bill?" asked the wounded outlaw.

"All through!" snapped Tug. "I gave him five hours to git out, and I reckon he went. If he shows up in Sunbeam, shoot him."

"Sounds all right," grinned the wounded one painfully. "Shootin' Skeeter Bill ain't no cinch. He's dangerous, Tug. When he stands sideways there ain't nothin' to shoot at."

"By ——, I won't stand for him livin' here!" snapped Tug venomously.

"Me and you is two different kind of caterpillars," smiled the wounded outlaw. "Skeeter Bill ain't never done nothin' to me."

"I'm runnin' this town!" roared Tug.

"Then run Skeeter Bill," retorted the wounded man, turning to the door, "I'm goin' to git my arm fixed up."

He shut the door behind him and almost ran into a man who was just coming in. The man growled and went inside. He went straight to Leeds. This newcomer was a lanky, pasty-faced type, and his breath came jerkily as he blurted:

"Tug, I just heard somethin' yuh might like to hear. Some of the miners had a meetin' tonight and they're goin' to form a vigilance committee to stop——"

"Hold on!" snapped Tug. "Git your breath, Cullop. Now, talk slow and don't git excited."

"Up at the Keystone," explained Cullop, "I heard 'em talkin', Tug. Said they was goin' to band together and lynch everybody what they suspected of robbin' miners. There was about a dozen of 'em. I heard 'em mention Skeeter Bill."

Tug Leeds laughed raspingly.

"That's good. By ——, I'll furnish the rope if they want to hang him. Cullop, you keep your ears and eyes open. Allen, you and Benson go to bed and keep your mouths shut. These miners will have a fine chance of findin' out anything. If Skeeter Bill shows up, let me know right away. Cullop, yuh better go to Skeeter's shack in the mornin' and see if that —— drunken lawyer went away, too."

The three men went out. Tug Leeds sat down at his desk and lit a fresh cigar. As far as the miners were concerned he felt no anxiety, but he was afraid that the effect of the vigilance committee might discourage his men. He could ill afford to have anything moral happen to Sunbeam.

He deliberated what he would do to "Sandy" McClain, the wounded outlaw, for insubordination. Sandy was temperamental, inclined to rebel, and Tug could not afford to have a discordant note in his organization. Either Billings or Mears could have disposed of Sandy, but both of them were gone. Tug left the dirty work to his assistants, not being a gunman himself. Tug could shoot, but not face to face with a man. He was an organizer—not an operative. He had at least a dozen men left, but not one of them could he trust as he trusted Billings and Mears.

"—— Skeeter Bill!" grunted Tug aloud.

He spat out his frayed cigar and prepared for bed. It had been a most unprofitable day for Tug Leeds, and Tug hated any day that did not show a balance on the right side of his ledger.

V

SKEETER BILL slept little that night. One of the outlaw's saddle-horses drifted into the camp and Skeeter Bill caught it. The horse had belonged to Mears. Somehow, Skeeter Bill was indignant at Leeds for sending his men on this mission. He felt that Mears and Brent had received their just deserts for robbing the wagon-train, and for some reason he did not feel this way because of anything antagonistic to Leeds.

Skeeter Bill found himself alined with law and order, but quickly recovered. Didn't he come down there to rob? Did the presence of this girl and the old preacher make him glad he was too late to beat

Leeds' gang? No, that was not it. The girl did not interest him at all and he had no sympathy for the minister.

He knew that Leeds and his gang would put him out of the way as speedily as possible when he showed up in Sunbeam. There were plenty ways of doing this—ways that would exonerate any one concerned. Skeeter was no supershot. It would be a dozen against one. He knew that the wisest course would be to start traveling away from Sunbeam, but Skeeter Bill had little wisdom in these things.

No, he would go back in spite of Leeds. The idea of backing the preacher amused Skeeter. He knew that Leeds and several other men would balk at a sermon in Sunbeam.

"Anyway," decided Skeeter, "I've got to go back after the judge, and this sky-pilot gives me a excuse. I've got to present Leeds with his daughter. Skeeter Bill, it's goin' to be a busy day for you."

Skeeter Bill prepared breakfast. Mary Leeds was cheerful, but Skeeter was able to see that she had slept little. The old minister walked with a decided limp and his left arm was very painful, but he talked cheerfully.

"Tell me something of this town of Sunbeam," said the minister as he watched Skeeter deftly removing slices of bacon from the spattering grease.

Skeeter looked over his shoulder at the old man.

"—— was built a long time ago, but somebody got hold of a map of it and built Sunbeam after the same idea."

"I — I — uh — surely you exaggerate," stammered the old minister. "Perhaps you are prejudiced."

Skeeter fished out more bacon before he replied.

"Yuh got me fightin' my own head, parson. Two of them words I don't *sabe* a-tall. You and the judge would make a good pair to draw to. He swallered a dictionary. Put on your nose-bags, folks. That coffee looks like stewed gunnysacks, don't it? If I was cookin' for saw-mills I wouldn't get a splinter. The judge does the cookin' at our shack, when he's sober enough, which ain't three meals a day reg'lar. Parson, I wish you'd temperance him for a while. The —— old fool is goin' to kill himself. First time he seen a pink elephant, and the second time it was a green buffalo, and now I'm bettin' he's about due to see a pinto geewhinkus. Any time he sees a pinto geewhinkus he's due to hammer a harp, yuh know it?"

The minister and Mary Leeds, neither of whom knew what Skeeter Bill meant, both nodded their heads and sat down to eat. Skeeter grinned, but the grin faded and he rubbed a hand across his chin. He turned to the minister and the girl.

"Folks, I want yuh to understand that Sunbeam ain't no civilized place. You're goin' into a camp-town, where everythin' goes except the cook-stove and three joints of pipe. Far as I can see you're both buckin' a brace game, and I just been figurin' out a combination that might help yuh both.

"Suppose, parson, that you kinda adopts the lady. Let everybody think she's your daughter. It ain't goin' to hurt neither one of you, is it? Kinda gives her protection, parson."

The old minister nodded slowly over his coffee and turned to the girl.

"My dear, I think our friend is right. I am more than ready to offer my protection, if you will accept."

"But why should we stoop to deception?" asked Mary. "Surely there is no harm in my going to Sunbeam to seek my father."

"Sunbeam," said Skeeter, "won't care a —— what you came there for. You'd be a maverick, miss. No, yuh better go in there as a preacher's daughter."

"Well," said Mary wearily, "it does not make the slightest difference to me. I fail to see why I should do this, except to humor you, Mr. Bill."

Skeeter Bill nodded seriously, but his face broke into a wide smile as he looked at her.

"Name's Sarg, ma'am. Everybody calls me Skeeter Bill for short. I dunno whether you made any more mistakes in your discourse or not, 'cause I don't *sabe* anythin' except English and cuss-words, but I appears to decipher that you'll be the preacher's daughter."

Mary Leeds nodded and smiled. It was almost impossible to look at Skeeter's homely face without smiling. The old man was slowly sipping at his coffee, looking absently off across the desert, but now he turned to Skeeter.

"My son, what line of endeavor do you pursue?"

Skeeter looked up quickly and stared at the old man.

"Just grazed me, parson," he said softly. "Hit me dead center with plain United States, will yuh?"

"I do not understand you."

Skeeter reached out a hand to the minister.

"Shake," he grinned. "*Sabe* sign-talk?"

"Sign-talk? No, I—I——"

"We're kinda ace-deuce, I reckon, parson. Your talk goes antegodlin' to me and I reckon my *wau-wau* fogs your brain complete-like. Just what did you ask me?"

"He wants to know what you do for a living," explained Mary Leeds, smiling at Skeeter's serious expression.

"Me?" Skeeter debated for a moment. "I'm a horse-thief."

"A horse-thief?" echoed Mary, while both of them stared blankly at Skeeter.

"When there's horses," nodded Skeeter. "Feller can't be too particular, yuh know. Might get into a goat country and starve to death."

"I can not believe that statement," declared Mary.

"Yuh can't?" Skeeter's smile faded. "That's the worst of it," he wailed. "If I lied you'd believe me, but when I tell the truth I'm called a liar."

"Surely you are not sincere," said the minister. "No man will willingly admit a thing that would incriminate himself. It is ridiculous for you to assert to us that you follow such a sordid profession."

Skeeter got slowly to his feet and brushed some crumbs off his wrinkled shirt.

"I reckon you two can ride my bronc to Sunbeam. He's broke to pack double, but I dunno a —— thing about this hammer-headed ring-tail what belonged to Mears; so I'll fork him myself."

"I do not attempt to follow your discourse," stated the minister, "but I wish you would eliminate the profanity, especially in the presence of the lady."

"My ——!" gasped Skeeter Bill, and turned to Mary. "Ma'am, I spent six weeks in a Cree Indian lodge. Had a busted leg, and the sheriff was ridin' sign on me. It was natcheral that I hankered for information, but the old war-whoop didn't *sabe* English and I didn't *sabe* Cree; so we argued to beat —— for six weeks and parted friends, 'cause neither one of us knowed what the other one meant. I'm kinda between, I reckon. A wise man uses words which I don't *sabe*, and a —— fool talks stuff that there ain't no sense to."

"Please do not swear so much," begged the minister.

"Swear—so—much?" Skeeter Bill was amazed. "Why, parson, I ain't swore once."

"I do not wish to appear critical," stated the minister, "but your adjectives are a—uh—trifle—uh——"

Skeeter Bill scratched his chin and studied the old minister, who was trying to grasp the proper word to convey the exact meaning. Mary Leeds turned away to hide a smile. Skeeter broke the silence.

"We'll let her go as she lays, parson. There's peace between us now, but I'll send you a red belt as sure as ——, if yuh don't quit talkin' thataway. Let's hit the trail. I want to get home before the judge gets so drunk I can't rope him to a saddle."

VI

JUDGE TAREYTON awoke from his debauch. To him there was no "morning after" because of the fact that his drunks corresponded to the average man's daily doings. The jug was empty, which also corresponded to the empty cupboard to the average man. The judge did not hunger, but he thirsted a-plenty.

As he placed the jug back on the chair, some one rapped loudly on the door. To have said, "Come in" would have been a very great effort for the judge's dry throat; so he got shakily out of bed and answered the knock in person. It was a miner, bearded to the eyes and with the muck of the creek upon him. The judge shoved his frowsy face thorugh the door and waited for the other to speak.

"Feller named Sarg live here?"

The judge took this under advisement, but finally admitted it with a curt nod.

"Here now?" asked the miner.

The judge considered this question, but gave a negative shake of his head. The man turned as if to leave, when the judge decided to take a chance on his vocal cords.

"What did you require of him?"

The man stopped and looked at the judge, as though undecided whether to disclose his mission or not. He stepped in closer and in a confidential tone inquired:

"Do yuh know if he heard about the vigilance committee or not?"

Judge Tareyton's face twitched, but he cleared his aching throat and shook his head.

"We're goin' to make these thieves around here danged hard to catch."

The judge swallowed with great difficulty, and watched the man walk away. He shut the door, stumbled back to his bunk and sank down.

"Vigilance committee!" he gasped aloud, and then added, "Lookin' for Skeeter Bill."

He picked up the empty jug, hoping against hope that it contained something beside an odor, but cast it aside, after holding it unsteadily over a tin cup. He looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. Where was Skeeter Bill? Maybe the vigilantes had already found him. The judge groaned aloud at his inability to do anything, when prompt action was needed.

He lifted his wadded pillow and disclosed two big Colt pistols. At least he could help a little, he thought. His hand trembled with the weight of one of them, the barrel describing irregular circles. He laid the gun on the bed and shook his head.

"I'm a menace to myself," he said aloud. "Not even able to hold a gun. As God is my judge, if I ever get over this—I'll very likely do it all over again. I'll——"

He stopped talking aloud to himself and stared at the floor. Again he looked at his watch.

"Five hours!" he grunted hoarsely. "Five hours they gave us to get out. Where is Skeeter Bill? Have they killed him?"

The judge almost squeaked that last question, but the bare walls of the shack did not even echo a reply. He got to his feet, found the remains of an old derby hat, an old Prince Albert coat, faded and torn. Fully attired he looked at himself in a broken mirror. For a moment he stared at the reflection, and with a sweep of his hand sent the glass crashing to the floor. His hand went to his eyes and he stumbled toward the door, where he stopped and looked back.

"Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursel's as ithers see us," he quoted bitterly. "Seven years of bad luck for breaking a mirror. Judge Tareyton, you're a disreputable old reprobate! By gad, sir, you are not fit to wear a steel bill and pick food in a barnyard with the chickens. I repeat, sir; you disgrace me. I wish——"

Came the sound of footsteps on the hard ground outside. For a moment the judge hesitated. There was not the slightest doubt but what this was either the vigilantes or some of Leeds' men, he thought. He settled his battered derby at a more secure angle, squared his stubbled jaw and opened the door. There stood Skeeter Bill, a girl and an old man.

JUDGE TAREYTON rubbed a hand across his eyes and stared at them. The girl was smiling at him, and the judge wondered if it was for him or at him. Skeeter turned to the minister and the girl.

"Folks, I wants to make yuh used to Judge Tareyton. Then he turned to the judge. "This here is a preacher named Weston, and the lady is his daughter."

The judge removed his battered hat and bowed low. It was an almost disastrous bow, for the judge was not at all steady in the knees, and his recovery was just a bit wabbly.

"Sir and ma'am, I am honored. Welcome to our humble village. There is not much for a visitor to see, that is true, but you must remember that the place is still in its swaddling clothes. Did I understand that you are a minister of the gospel?"

"Correctly," nodded the minister. "I am here to bring a message to the dim places. Perhaps it is just a trifle strange for a man of my age to take up missionary work, but I felt called to do this and—I am here."

"No doubt of that," nodded the judge absently. "Not a scintilla of doubt."

The judge shifted his bleared eyes and swept the visible part of the town.

"Sir, I have often groped for a word which would describe Sunbeam, but until now it has evaded me. Dim. Yes, that is the word. By gad, sir, this most surely is one of the dim places, and I hope your light never flickers."

"God willing, it never will, sir."

"I'm backin' his play, judge," stated Skeeter Bill.

Judge Tareyton stared at Skeeter, as if not believing his own ears. He stared at Skeeter until Skeeter shifted uneasily under that steady gaze.

"Perhaps we had better go to the hotel," said Mary Leeds.

"There ain't none," replied Skeeter slowly. "I just been thinkin' that mebbe Mrs Porter would take yuh both in. Don't yuh reckon that's the best idea, judge?"

The judge nodded slowly and cleared his throat.

"A very, very good idea, Skeeter Bill. I have no doubt but what the good soul would welcome them."

Skeeter Bill turned as if to go on, but the judge stopped him.

"Skeeter Bill, have you four-bits? The oil has all burned out of the old lamp."

Skeeter grinned and handed him a silver dollar.

"Come on, folks, we'll visit Mrs. Porter. *Adios*, judge."

The judge nearly fell trying to execute his bow and move swiftly toward the street at the same time. His whole being shrieked for liquor and he forgot Leeds' warning or the danger of a vigilance committee. His right hand gripped that silver dollar until it fairly cut into the palm of his hand.

"Dim places," he muttered as he stumbled into the street. "By gad, the old lamp is badly in need of oil."

Blindly he entered the Panhandle and leaned on the bar. The dollar clattered on the painted wood, the clink of bottle-neck on thin glass—the old lamp flickered up again.

Mrs. Porter had been made a widow by virtue of a stick of dynamite, which did not live up to its scientific principles of only exploding when detonated. She had found herself alone in Sunbeam, in dire necessity of making a living; so she turned to the business of laundress.

History of the old West does not record that outlaws ever stooped to dealing with such plebeian things as a bundle of laundry, but it is a fact that many of them had human desires for clean clothes. Skeeter Bill and the judge had little knowledge of laundry—hence the acquaintance of Mrs. Porter and her flat-irons.

Mrs. Porter was busily engaged in her chosen profession when Skeeter Bill arrived with his charges.

"Would you believe it?" exclaimed Mrs. Porter, after the introductions. "A preacher and his girl! Well, now ain't it too bad you didn't show up a month ago? Jim Porter didn't have no preacher to speak over him. Jim was pretty good—good as husbands go—and it was hard to plant him without any respectable prayers."

"Can yuh put 'em up for a while, ma'am?" asked Skeeter Bill.

"I can, Mr. Sarg. I have a cot for the lady; and the preacher—" Mrs. Porter sized up the old minister, much to his embarrassment— "I think he ain't too long for the lounge. Jim hung over at both ends, when he layed down on it, but you're kinda runty. Sure, I can put you up. When do you start preachin'?"

"Is there a church?"

"A church?" Mrs. Porter wiped a soapy hand on her apron and looked appealingly at Skeeter. "Church in Sunbeam? Now would you listen to the innocent man, Mr. Sarg?"

"I reckon they don't understand Sunbeam, ma'am," said Skeeter, and added, "But I reckon they'll learn."

"I dunno." Mrs. Porter shook her head sadly. "I dunno. Jim Porter 'lowed he knowed dynamite from A to Izzard. 'Course, nobody knows what Jim done, but it's almost a cinch he got flip with a stick of it. Say, Jeff Billings had some laundry here, which is a total loss to me, as you might say."

Skeeter Bill rubbed his chin for a moment, but reached in his pocket and took out some money.

"Dollar cover it, ma'am?"

"Plenty," nodded Mrs. Porter, accepting the silver. "Might as well take the stuff and wear it."

Skeeter opened his mouth several times, as if unable to frame a reply, but finally shook his head violently. Skeeter Bill was hard-boiled, but he could hardly think of wearing the clothes of the man he had killed.

"Go right in the house," urged Mrs. Porter, and Mary Leeds and the minister started in.

"Ain't you comin' in, Mr. Sarg?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"Nope," Skeeter shook his head. "I—I've gotta job to do. See yuh later, folks."

"Thank you so much," said Mary Leeds, holding out her hand.

Skeeter reached for the hand, but missed and grasped her elbow, much to his confusion, but he shook her arm solemnly and hurried away without looking back.

"Gee cripes!" he muttered to himself. "Clumsy danged hippy-pot-a-must! Can't even shake hands. That drunken old pardner of mine makes me ashamed that I never learned how to bow. Now, I reckon I've got to turn reg'lar killer to make good with the sky-pilot."

He swung into the street and headed for the Panhandle.

VII

THE silver dollar worked wonders with Judge Tareyton. After the second drink he began to realize the seriousness of his position. Leeds' warning, as told by Skeeter, came back to him. Nervously he ran the back of his hand across his lips and turned his head slowly, feeling that some one was watching him.

Behind him, leaning against the edge of a table, stood Tug Leeds. They faced each other. The liquor had made the judge strangely cool, and his form straightened in dignity as he gazed upon the man who had ordered him out of the town. Then Tug Leeds spoke.

"Still in town, eh?"

"I beg your pa'don," drawled the judge slowly, brushing an imaginary speck from the lapel of his frayed coat. "You spoke to me, sir?"

Tug Leeds walked slowly up to the judge, his heavy under-jaw shoved out, as if trying to intimidate the other with his physical appearance. He halted with his face within a foot of the judge's face and stared into his eyes.

"You know —— well I spoke to you!" snarled Tug. "I told Sarg I'd give yuh both five hours to git out of this country. I reckon he had brains enough to take my warnin'."

"You gave us five hours?" queried the judge. "By gad, that was generous of you, sir—mighty generous. Not to be outdone in generosity, Skeeter Bill gave us five hours, and the least I could do would be to reciprocate, which gave us a grand total of fifteen hours. I am sure that Skeeter Bill will join me in thanking you kindly, sir."

For a moment Tug Leeds studied this reply. Tug was slow of understanding, but it suddenly dawned upon him that the judge was making a fool of him and belittling his warning.

Like a flash, Tug drew back his right hand and drove his fist into the judge's face. The blow sent the judge staggering back, blinded by the impact. Leeds sprang into him, striking with both hands. The judge went to his knees, with both hands covering his face.

Came the scrape of a boot across the threshold and a lithe, lanky figure flashed past the crouched figure of the old judge and faced Tug Leeds. Skeeter Bill's face was white with wrath. His eyes were mere, indistinct slits under his eyebrows, and the big humorous mouth was as narrow and harsh as a pencil-mark.

Tug Leeds' hand dropped to his gun and he tried to move back, but Skeeter struck—struck as the panther strikes, and the blow, curving downward, struck Leeds on the chin. The force of the blow seemed to unhook Leeds' under-jaw and paralyze his nerves.

Swiftly Skeeter moved ahead half a step. A long, left arm uncoiled, with the weight of that long, muscular body behind it and the fist caught Leeds under that sagging chin. Came the snap of teeth, a short animal-like grunt, and Tug Leeds slumped in a heap—knocked cold.

Quickly Skeeter Bill caught his balance and faced the room, a heavy Colt pistol tense at his hip. But the awed crowd made no move. Several of Leeds' men were in the audience, but they remained unmoved. The judge got slowly to his feet, blood trickling from his battered face, and looked around. Tug Leeds did not move. The judge looked from Tug to Skeeter, and then stepped over beside Tug, where he appeared to examine the fallen man.

"Skeeter Bill," he said painfully, "I'm sorry you hit him so hard."

"You feelin' sorry for him?" Skeeter's voice was barely audible.

The judge nodded.

"Skeeter, I am sorry for any man who was born without any conception of humor. This man would be a good citizen if he knew when to laugh."

Skeeter did not reply. It is doubtful whether he knew what the judge meant. He had not taken his eyes off the men in front of him. Now he spoke.

"I just want to say to yuh all; I'm goin' to stay in Sunbeam—as—long—as—I—live. Any of yuh can pack that talk to Tug Leeds when he wakes up. Yuh can tell him that I'm goin' to kill the next man what touches my pardner. That goes for Sunbeam; *sabe?*"

Without turning his head he spoke to the judge—

"Go out ahead of me, pardner."

The judge turned and went out of the door, and Skeeter Bill backed slowly out of the place until he hit the rickety board sidewalk, where he stepped swiftly aside out of range of the windows and hurried after the judge.

They walked back to their shack and went inside before either spoke a word. Skeeter got a towel and sponged the blood from the judge's face, working as tenderly as a woman.

"Ought to 'a' let him start to pull," muttered Skeeter. "Reckon I forgot I had a gun."

Skeeter finished his rough surgery, and the judge walked over across the room to where the mirror had hung, but remembered smashing it.

"I am beginning to be superstitious, Skeeter Bill," he said, turning to Skeeter. "I smashed our mirror today, and the old belief concerning broken mirrors seems to have started its baleful predictions."

"Tug Leeds must 'a' smashed one, too," grinned Skeeter, examining his sore knuckles. Then, seriously, "What did he say to you, judge?"

"Chided me for not obeying his order. He was under the impression that you had left the country. By the way, Skeeter Bill, the miners are forming a vigilance committee to run out outlawry from Sunbeam."

"What?" Skeeter Bill got to his feet staring at the judge. "Vigilance committee? How do yuh know?"

"One of them came looking for you."

SKEETER BILL'S eyes were serious and the lines deepened around his mouth. It was one thing to fight outlaws and another to fight against law and order. It was true that no one knew him as one of the outlaws, none that he knew about, but why should one of the committee come to find him? The judge's voice brought him out of his reveries.

"What about this minister and the girl, Skeeter Bill? What did you mean by saying that you were going to back them?"

"What I said, I reckon," replied Skeeter, staring at the floor.

"Getting religious, Skeeter Bill?" softly.

Skeeter looked at the judge and a smile wreathed his lips.

"No-o-o, I reckon not, judge. Yuh see I kinda figured that a sky-pilot would rasp Tug Leeds plumb ragged. Tug orates that he owns the town, and I knowed he'd just about rise and shine at the idea of holdin' church in Sunbeam."

"Just where did you discover these folks?"

Skeeter told him of the fight at the Poplar Springs, and the wiping out of the whole outfit, with the exceptions of the minister and the girl. Judge Tareyton listened closely to the description of the burial, shaking his head sadly.

"I knew Williams," he said softly. "Tug Leeds' soul, if he has a soul, should shrivel and die with last night's work. Williams was a good man. By gad, Skeeter Bill, this outlawry should be wiped out! Leeds and his crew should be dangling from ropes at this minute. I'm——"

"Hol' on," said Skeeter hoarsely, "Hol' on, judge. I'm no better than they are. I ain't never killed no helpless folks—ain't never killed no man who ain't had a even break, but I reckon mebbe they'd better string me up with the rest of 'em."

Judge Tareyton stared at Skeeter Bill's outburst. It was not often that Skeeter Bill showed any emotion by voice or action, but now his homely face was very serious, and his long arms dangled loosely at his sides as he stared into space.

For an appreciable space of time not a word was spoken; then the judge crossed the room and put his hand on Skeeter Bill's shoulder.

Skeeter looked up quickly.

"Don't say it, pardner. You'd argue that I wasn't as bad as that bunch and didn't deserve what they do, but you're wrong. If they deserve a rope—so do I."

"Skeeter Bill," said the judge softly, "you jump at conclusions. I was just going to agree with you."

Skeeter looked up at the serious expression on Judge Tareyton's face and broke into a laugh. Skeeter Bill did not confine his merriment to facial contortions and vocal expression—he laughed from his heels to his head.

"They may hang you," said the judge when Skeeter had regained normal conditions, "but I am fairly sure that you will be the only one at the occasion to see any humor in the situation."

"I hope it's a funny hangin'," said Skeeter, serious again. " 'Pears to me that it's a even bet whether I get hung or killed with a bullet. Kinda between the devil and the deep blue sea, as my dad used to say. I ain't got much choice, I reckon, unless it is to get out of town, and I hates to be herded."

"Perhaps we had better go," suggested

the judge. "There are many, many places where we could go, Skeeter Bill. Suppose we pack up our belongings and——"

"Hol' on!" Skeeter shook his head. "What about the old minister and the girl? I reckon I've got to see that they gets a square deal. I tol' the old sky-pilot that I was with him from the dally to the hondo, and I can't renege, judge."

"But what can you do?" argued the judge. "One man against a dozen or more. No, I think we had better go."

Skeeter Bill shook his head.

"Nope."

Judge Tareyton studied Skeeter for a while, a half-smile on his face.

"Has this—uh—young lady anything to do with your —— stubbornness, Skeeter Bill?"

Skeeter looked up quickly.

"I don't reckon so, judge. No-o-o, I wasn't thinkin' about her."

"Nice looking girl," observed the judge wisely. "Very fine face. Well worth knowing, I might say. Her father did wrong in bringing her here."

"He didn't." Skeeter shook his head. "Not the way you mean, judge. She came lookin' for him."

"Looking for him? What do you mean?"

Skeeter smiled.

"That preacher ain't her father. I just fixed it up thataway so she'd have protection. She comes here kinda huntin' her father, like I said before, but I—her father is—Tug Leeds."

"Tug Leeds?" The judge's voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"Her name is Mary Leeds," explained Skeeter. "She's likely forgot what he looks like, bein' as she ain't seen him for fourteen years. She heard somebody say that a man named Leeds lived in Sunbeam. I dunno how to tell her, 'cause Tug ain't fit to be her dad."

Judge Tareyton's mouth twitched and his hand trembled as he wiped it across his dry lips. For a few moments he seemed incapable of speech.

"I dunno how we can keep her from findin' it out," said Skeeter helplessly. "She don't know how low her dad is, judge."

"No," said the judge hoarsely. "No, she don't, Skeeter Bill, and we've got to keep her from ever findin' it out, if we can."

"Which don't stop him from bein' her dad," said Skeeter. "She's got to find it out pretty soon. Tug Leeds is too prominent, and somebody is bound to mention him where she can hear it. Nobody outside of me and you and his gang knows what he really is, but everybody knows he kinda bosses the town, and they all knows the kind of—shucks!"

"You had a fair start, Skeeter Bill, but you got all tangled up with words. I know what you mean anyway. Just what is to be done? We must try and keep the girl from meeting him, because she is too fine, I think, to have her future marred by knowing that she is the daughter of Tug Leeds."

Skeeter stared at the judge for a moment and got to his feet. He was very deliberate as he dug under the pillow on the bunk and took out one of the heavy pistols, which he shoved inside the waist-band of his overalls.

"What is the idea, Skeeter Bill?" asked the judge.

Skeeter half-smiled.

"I'm goin' to kill Tug Leeds, judge. Mebbe we can get somebody to tell her that Bill Jones got in the road of my bullet. Anyway, we can get him buried before she has a chance to find out who he was, and, anyway, she ain't seen him for years."

The judge nodded slowly, as if in agreement with Skeeter's scheme, but when Skeeter finished the judge said:

"Rough in construction, Skeeter Bill. The intent is very good, I might say, but your scheme reminds me of the Frenchman's flea-powder directions, 'First you must catch de leetle flea.' When you open that door again, you are an animated target for Leeds' men. Does——"

BOTH men glanced at the door and at each other. Some one was knocking softly on the outside. Skeeter Bill backed against the wall, loosened both guns and nodded to the judge, who had walked close to the door. He opened the door, shielding himself with it as he swung it open.

Three men, one of them the miner who had inquired for Skeeter that morning, were standing at the door. He nodded to the judge and said—

"Sarg in yet?"

"Sure is," said Skeeter Bill, moving toward the door.

He had a smile on his face, a careless swing to his slow movements, but both hands were kept near his guns, as he came up beside the judge.

"Like to talk to yuh, Sarg," said the miner. "Can we come inside?"

"Sure—come on in," nodded Sarg, and the three men filed past him.

Two of them sat down, but the spokesman stood near the table. He was a middle-aged man, his beard and hair slightly gray. The other two were younger, but their clothes and general appearance proclaimed them to be placer miners.

"My name's John McClung," stated the spokesman, "McClung of the Solomon." He pointed to the other two. "This is Jerry Byler, of the Ophir, and Dick Franklyn, of the Keystone."

"Glad t' meetcha," nodded Skeeter. "Gents, this is Judge Tareyton, my pardner. Whatcha got on your mind?"

McClung hesitated, as if a trifle afraid to start the conversation. He cleared his throat softly.

"Sarg, you killed Jeff Billings yesterday."

Skeeter's eyes flashed from face to face, but there was nothing to show that these men were more than mildly interested in the fact that he had killed Billings.

"Uh-huh," nodded Skeeter. "An' then what?"

"Billings was a gun-fighter," stated McClung. "He had a bad rep. We found out today that Billings was the leader of the gang that robbed my place and took two hundred ounces of gold."

"Two men was killed," said Byler. "Two men that we didn't know. They has been buried."

"Two hundred ounces of gold ain't goin' to break me," continued McClung, "but it shows that we've got to protect ourselves. Billings wasn't alone in this here robbery. We just heard that Rance Williams was killed at Poplar Springs last night and his whole outfit wiped out—all except a preacher and his girl. This preacher told Jerry."

"Jerry was over to see Mrs. Porter," said Franklyn meaningly. "He has dirty shirts every day in the week and two on Sunday."

"I found 'em," nodded Skeeter.

"They said yuh did," agreed Byler. "That's one of the reasons we come to see yuh. McClung was lookin' for yuh this mornin'. After we found out that yuh brought the preacher and the girl in, we came again."

"Just why did yuh want to see me?" asked Skeeter.

"Cause you've got nerve," stated McClung quickly. "Sunbeam needs a man with nerve right now." He looked at the judge and back of Skeeter. "Your pardner is a lawyer, and we kinda reckoned that a lawyer won't hurt us none, bein' as we wants this kinda done right. We're formin' a vigilance committee and we need a leader. You are the man we need."

Skeeter turned his head slightly and looked at the judge, who was staring at the floor, a half-smile on his flabby face.

"Tug Leeds said you was the right man to get," said Byler.

Skeeter's mouth sagged for a moment at this statement, but he turned slowly to Byler, a quizzical smile on his lips.

"Tug Leeds said that?"

"Today," nodded McClung. "Kinda funny, at that. We talked about you last night. Tug has bought half-interest in the Keystone—bought it this mornin', and he comes to Dick and opines that the best thing to do is to get up a vigilance committee to stamp out the outlaws. He said that you was the one man in Sunbeam to be the leader."

"Anybody speak about me before he did?" asked Skeeter.

"I did," replied Franklyn. "Tug offered me a big price for half of my claim, and after the deal was all closed, he suggested this committee. I told him we had talked it over, and kinda figured on gettin' you for a leader. He said he thought it was a good scheme, but he said he'd take charge if we couldn't get hold of you."

"It's goin' to take a little time," said McClung. "We don't know just what we're goin' to do first, and we don't want to make no bad moves. All we wants is for you to take charge of it, if yuh can. Yore pardner can give us the benefit of what he knows about law. We don't want to go ——in' into somethin' and do it all wrong."

"No," agreed the judge absently, "you do not want to do things wrong. It is a weighty problem, gentlemen, and I would like to talk things over with Mr. Sarg before he decides what he will do."

"Sure, take your time," agreed McClung. "This ain't nothin' yuh can rush, but we've got to kinda get organized as soon as possible. When can yuh let us know?"

"Tomorrow," replied the judge. "Tomorrow morning, I reckon."

"Seen Leeds lately?" asked Skeeter.

"Not since early this mornin'," replied Franklyn. "He came to my cabin and bought in with me. Said he thought you had left Sunbeam for good."

"Might be a good thing for you to have a talk with Leeds," suggested McClung. "Seems like he's got some good ideas on handlin' this here proposition."

Skeeter nodded slowly.

"Mebbe I better do that, McClung. I'll try and see yuh tomorrow."

* * *

THE three miners shook hands with Skeeter and the judge and went out. Skeeter watched them walk back toward the north end of town and then turned back to the judge, who was sitting on the edge of the bunk, holding his head in his hands.

"Skeeter Bill," he said hoarsely, "I want to laugh. I want to shake my sides with merriment, but I am—too— —— dry. I'd sell my soul to a scavenger for one drink of bad whisky."

Skeeter studied him for a few moments. There was no question but what Judge Tareyton was suffering. Skeeter walked to a corner of the room, lifted a half-nailed board and groped under the rough flooring. His hand came up holding a quart flask of liquor, and he looked at it in disgust. He looked back at the humped figure on the bunk, and the lines of his face softened.

"Judge," he said, as he walked slowly over to the bunk, "I had this cached away for a rainy day. I reckon we'll prognosticate a stormy night."

Judge Tareyton lifted his head and stared at the bottle. His tongue-tip ran slowly across his dry upper lip and his bushy eyebrows lifted perceptibly, as he reached for the bottle.

"Skeeter Bill, you have saved my life," he whispered. "The devil laughs at a time like this."

He lifted the bottle to his lips and drank greedily. The liquor flashed through his being and he shrugged his heavy shoulders, as if shuddering from pain.

"Well!" He looked up at Skeeter seriously. "Well, I hope he gets a good laugh out of it, because I believe in giving the devil his due."

"What do you think of Leeds?" asked Skeeter.

"Clever scoundrel," pronounced the judge; "anticipated the vigilantes by joining at once. Became a mine-owner for self-protection."

"Told 'em I'd make a good leader," mused Skeeter.

"Protecting himself in case you are assassinated," declared the judge. "Make you the leader, because you can't very well denounce him without incriminating yourself. You will soon be killed and he will be the leader. Tug Leeds is fairly clever, Skeeter Bill, and he will use the vigilante organization to further his own ends."

"No, I can't tell on him," agreed Skeeter. "I kinda like these miners, judge. They're right, don't yuh know they are? I ain't no danged milk-fed calf, judge, but I kinda wish me and you was right. Aw, I ain't afraid of Tug Leeds, nor afraid of them honest miners, but——"

Judge Tareyton sat staring at the half-empty bottle, scratching at the dirty label with a rough thumb nail. He looked up at Skeeter.

"I know how yuh feel, Skeeter Bill. God put a spark of something into all of us—a spark that flares up once in a while. I had one—once, but I guess I drowned it with hooch."

"Aw-w, you're all right," said Skeeter quickly; "I was thinkin' about me. I've stole cows, horses, money and I've killed men. I've been a ——winder of a cute little person, ain't I?

"Now, some honest men comes along and asks me to help 'em put a rope around the necks of my own kind. Me and you and Tug Leeds are the only ones in Sunbeam what knows who I am. Tug knowed about me from somebody down Mohave way, I reckon, and that's why he asks me to work with him. Billings and 'Blondy' Jones and 'Kid' Sisler knowed I was in that Solomon deal, but they're all gone now. Tug is the only one of the gang what could yelp out loud about me. The rest could only say what they've heard."

"You promised to help that preacher," reminded the judge.

"Sure did, judge. That goes as she lays, and I reckon the only way I can help out his cause is to kill Tug Leeds right away."

Skeeter opened the door to go out, but stopped on the threshold, facing the Reverend Josiah Weston.

VIII

SKEETER'S blows had both injured and humiliated Tug Leeds. His lower jaw pained him greatly, but the greater pain was within his soul, for Tug Leeds had never been knocked out before. He knew that his power in Sunbeam had dwindled, because no man respects or cares to take orders from the vanquished.

Nothing was said about the fight to him. He was allowed to recover in his own way, get to his feet by his own volition. Tug was in a killing mood when he went back to his own room and proceeded to imbibe quantities of liquor and rub liniment on his wrenched jaw muscles.

"Twin" Shevlin, who had charge of the Panhandle gambling business, thoroughly enjoyed it. Tug had beaten Twin thoroughly a week before, and Twin's crooked mind had worked overtime in wishing disaster to come upon Tug Leeds.

Twin was a frail anemic flash gambler type. His linen was always spotless, his nails manicured and his tiny mustache always trimmed to a nicety. Twin was a crooked gambler. Otherwise he would not have been in Tug Leeds' employ.

It was Twin who first saw Mary Leeds as she came quietly into the gambling-hall, looking timidly around, and he lost no time in approaching her. He listened while she asked permission to post a notice in the place. He read one of the hand-printed notices and looked thoughtfully at her.

"I'll see the boss, if you want me to," said Twin and went back to the room, where Tug was lying on his bed.

Tug cursed vitriolically at the request, but sat up when Twin described the girl. Girls were scarce in Sunbeam. The habitués of the Panhandle were greatly interested in Mary Leeds. The coarse dance-hall girls examined her raiment at close range and were not a bit delicate in their comments, but scattered like partridges at the approach of Tug Leeds.

Tug read the notices, a cold glint in his eyes, and was about to give the girl to understand that religion was not wanted in Sunbeam, when she mentioned the fact that Mr. Sarg was going to help them. Tug grew interested.

"What did yuh say Sarg was goin' to do?" he asked.

Mary told him about the trouble at the Poplar Springs, and of how Skeeter Bill had assisted them. The Panhandle crowd listened closely while she innocently told of how Skeeter Bill was going to help them bring the gospel to Sunbeam. Tug nursed his sore jaw and worked his mind overtime.

The Reverend Josiah Weston came to the Panhandle, looking for Mary Leeds, just in time to be taken into consideration by Tug Leeds.

"Your daughter's been tellin' me about how yuh got taken in by Skeeter Sarg," stated Tug. "He's a slick *hombre*, that feller. Murdered Jeff Billings yesterday, and we runs him out of town. Likely mixed up in that killin' at the Springs and came back to see if there was anythin' he overlooked."

The Reverend Dr. Weston was shocked. Mary Leeds started to voice her unbelief, but the buzz of corroborative conversation, regarding the killing of Jeff Billings, convinced her that her estimate of Skeeter Bill was all wrong. It was hard to belive that Skeeter Bill was a murderer, but facts are facts. Skeeter had told them that he was a horse-thief.

"But," objected the Reverend Weston, "why should he be so anxious to assist us?"

Tug grinned and caressed his sore jaw. His eyes turned to Mary Leeds and back to the minister.

"Pretty girls are scarce in this country," he said enigmatically.

Mary Leeds flushed and a suppressed giggle came from the group of dance-hall girls.

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Sarg had ulterior motives?" asked the minister.

"I reckon yuh might call it that, if yuh wanted to be polite," agreed Tug. "He sure had a motive."

Tug grinned and glanced around the room. There was no one in the place except his own crowd. Leaning against the bar, one arm in a sling, stood Sandy McClain, indifferently watching and listening. Tug's eyes narrowed at the sight of McClain and their glances met.

McClain was thin-faced, thin-lipped, with eyes as expressionless as blue agate. McClain was a capable man—too capable. He was like a wolf which runs with the pack, but is not one of them; a strong fighter, which seems to bide its time to step in and wrest the leadership from the old pack master. Tug Leeds feared McClain.

Tug's eyes shifted from McClain and he spoke directly to the minister.

"Your horse-thief friend promised yuh a lot, I reckon, but I'll show yuh that Sunbeam appreciates your comin'. Tonight at nine o'clock I'll let yuh preach right in here—here in the Panhandle."

For a moment there was silence—then McClain laughed. It was not a hearty laugh, but a toneless flutter of the vocal cords. The crowd flashed a look at McClain, but his face had not changed expression. In fact he was not seemingly interested in the conversation. Tug's heavy body stiffened, but he made no move. That laugh annoyed him.

"You—you mean that we can hold services in here?" faltered the minister.

"Y'betcha," nodded Tug, his eyes still on McClain.

"I think it is very kind of you," said Mary Leeds sweetly.

Again McClain's lips parted in that toneless chuckle. His eyes lifted and he looked blankly at Tug for a moment and then moved sidewise to the door and went out.

The going of Sandy McClain seemed to leave a chill over the place. Gamblers looked at each other meaningly. One of the dance-hall girls drew a hand across her lips, leaving a crimson smudge across her cheek. They all had a feeling that something was going to happen very soon. McClain was a killer—a rattlesnake which might strike without any warning. There was also Skeeter Bill to reckon with. They looked askance at Mary Leeds, as if blaming her for interrupting the peace of Sunbeam.

"Then it is settled," said the minister, breaking the quiet, "I shall hold services here this evening, and I want to thank you for your kindness to me and my—er—daughter. Good-day, sir."

Mary Leeds turned and followed the old minister outside, while the crowd watched them in silence. Then Tug Leeds laughed loudly. Some of them, appreciating the wit and humor of their king, also laughed, but there was little mirth and no joy in the laughter.

IX

SKEETER BILL stared at the minister.

"I—I was just goin' to start in helpin' yuh," stammered Skeeter foolishly.

"I thank you," said the old minister kindly. "It was fine of you not to forget me, but I do not think I will need any assistance. Things are progressing very nicely."

"Yuh got started already?"

"Yes, indeed. Miss—er—my daughter——"

"Miss Leeds," corrected Skeeter, as the minister hesitated at the sight of Judge Tareyton standing behind Skeeter. "The judge *sabes* the whole works."

"Ah, yes," nodded the minister; "I see. As I was saying, she has been of very much service to me today. I was a trifle dubious over the reception accorded me, don't you see. I talked with the estimable Mrs. Porter and she suggested that I—er—preach on the street. I could see the wisdom of such a course at once.

"Miss Leeds and I discussed this, with the result that I prepared several announcements for services this evening. Miss Leeds and I proceeded to post these in prominent places. There was no doubt of the sensation these created."

"I reckon not," drawled Skeeter.

"But that is not all," said the minister triumphantly. "Miss Leeds asked the owner of a place called the Panhandle if she might post a notice therein. The man read it, rather curiously, I think, but acquiesced. He talked with Miss Leeds and I for some little time, but at the conclusion of this talk he offered to let us have the use of his entire establishment for the evening. I told him about your kindness to us."

"Keep on talkin'," said Skeeter seriously. "What did he say about me?"

"I told him that you were going to help me and he seemed to be greatly amused. You were very good to us, Mr. Sarg, and I came over to assure you that in spite of anything we appreciate your kindness."

"In spite of anythin'," repeated Skeeter. "You're just as welcome as if you burned your shirt."

For a while there was silence. The minister seemed to be trying to continue the conversation, but lacked fitting words. Skeeter Bill's gaze slowly swept the rear of visible buildings and came back to the minister.

"Yuh don't know what that man's name was, do yuh?"

"They called him Mr. Tug, I think."

"Mr. Tug," said Skeeter slowly. "I know him."

"Yes, I thought you did," said the minister. "He told me he had ordered you out of town."

"My ——!" gasped Skeeter. "He didn't leave much of anythin' to talk about, did he? Was the lady there when he talked so much?"

"Yes. He said she should know everything. But I assure you that we are very grateful——"

"You're awful danged welcome," said Skeeter bitterly. "Good day."

Skeeter started to shut the door.

"Just a moment," said the minister, and Skeeter turned his head. "Do you know of a family named Honkatonk? I have a message to the Honkatonk girls, and I——"

But Skeeter Bill shut the door, leaving the minister finishing his sentence to the exterior of the shack.

JUDGE TAREYTON faced Skeeter and they stared at each other for several moments. From outside came the sound of footsteps as the minister turned and started away. Then the judge sat down on his bunk and picked up the bottle.

"At any rate, Skeeter Bill, you are relieved from any further necessity of assisting the spreading of gospel in Sunbeam town."

Skeeter stared at the floor and rubbed a hand slowly across his chin.

"Well, judge, they can't say I lied to 'em. I told 'em I was a horse-thief but they wouldn't believe me."

"Skeeter Bill," said the judge seriously, "you have been vindicated, but I still maintain that we are in a —— precarious position."

"Feller can't die but once, judge."

"Nor live," nodded the judge," I am still of the opinion that our skin is worth more to us than to posterity. Tonight, when the mantle of darkness covers the hills, we really must fold our tents and silently steal away."

"I am a thief," nodded Skeeter, "but I won't steal away. Tonight when this here mantle covers the hills, I'm goin' to church; *sabe?*"

Judge Tareyton measured a spot on the bottle and lowered the contents to the exact spot.

"Skeeter Bill, I shall go with you. It will shock the devil—I am very sure of that, but there will be little cause for the angels to sing—yet."

Judge Tareyton sighed with regret as the supply of liquor dwindled. Night came swiftly after the sunset, and the room was already in semidarkness. Across the room from the judge stood Skeeter Bill, leaning against the one window, his tall figure slightly bowed. There were no sounds in the room except the creak of the bed as the judge reached for and replaced the almost empty bottle.

Suddenly Skeeter straightened and peered out of the window. A figure was coming toward the shack. As it came closer Skeeter saw that it was Mary Leeds. As she passed the corner of the shack, Skeeter stepped over and opened the door.

She stopped just short of the doorway and peered at him. Neither of them spoke for nearly a minute, then Skeeter Bill said softly—

"Evenin', ma'am."

"Oh, I—I couldn't see you very well," faltered Mary Leeds, "I——"

"Won't yuh come in?" asked Skeeter.

"No, I——"

"Thassall right," nodded Skeeter. "I don't blame yuh."

"But I want you to—I—" Mary Leeds grew confused.

"Lemme say it for yuh, ma'am. You know I'm a bad *hombre*, but you're tryin' to excuse me. That's fine. I sure do appreciate it, but the fact that I'm a bad *hombre* still hangs around, don't it? Mebbe you're sorry for me, ma'am."

"Yes," said Mary Leeds simply.

"Don't do it, ma'am," Skeeter straightened up. "Don't do it. Laugh at me if yuh want to, but——"

"I just wanted you to know that it doesn't make any difference what they say about you," interrupted Mary Leeds. "You were very kind and considerate, and I want to thank you for it."

Judge Tareyton came slowly to the door, brushing back his long hair and trying to make his weak knees carry his dead-weight body.

"Good evening," said Mary Leeds.

"I have never seen a better one," replied the judge hoarsely, bowing with difficulty. "The night hath many charms, but never before have I observed them from my own door. Will you not come in?"

"No," Skeeter shook his head. "No, judge. It ain't square to her to ask her into our house, 'cause she might accept to keep from hurtin' our feelin's."

"I'm sorry," said Mary Leeds softly, and turned away.

THEY watched her disappear in the direction of the Porter home.

"She is sorry," stated the judge. "Did you hear that, Skeeter Bill. She pities you, and pity is akin to love."

Skeeter laughed hoarsely.

"Pity a horse-thief? Mebbe she could, judge, but it would be as impossible as —— for her to love one. No, she don't feel sorry for me. She's like a lot of human bein's, who comes around and tells yuh how sorry they are—not doin' it because they're sorry, but because they figger that it's the proper thing to do. If she was honest she'd tell me that she was much obliged for my help and sorry she bothered me."

"I would rather hear you laugh, Skeeter Bill," said the judge. "Tug Leeds would howl with delight if he knew how you were feeling at this moment. I anticipate something out of the ordinary in sermons tonight, as I am keyed to such a pitch that I could enjoy something extraordinary."

"If I go there it will mean a killing," said Skeeter thoughtfully. "The preacher and the girl both think I'm plumb ornery now, and if I start a killin' they won't feel any better about me."

"Painful but true," admitted the judge. "But just why did Tug Leeds give them the use of the saloon? It is a sure thing that it is not because he favors a sermon. Mary Leeds is a mighty likely looking girl, Skeeter Bill."

Skeeter nodded and turned away from the door. It was dark in the cabin and Skeeter mechanically picked up an old bottle and lit the candle which was stuck in the neck. The candle flickered for a moment from a draught from the open door. Came the crash of splintering glass, the candle disappeared, and from outside sounded the whip-like crack of a rifle.

Skeeter flung himself sidewise against the wall, while the judge stumbled out of line with the door. Two more shots pinged through the door, splintering their way out through the back of the cabin.

"Skeeter!" called the judge fearfully.

"Present," grunted Skeeter. "Everythin' accounted for except the bottle and candle. Keep out of line with that door, judge."

"Tug Leeds opens the dance," observed the judge.

"With a bad mistake," chuckled Skeeter. "He should 'a' held a foot further to the left. That's the beauty of bein' skinny, judge. If you'd 'a' been in my place you'd a been a ghost right now."

"What will we do now?"

"Kill somebody, judge. That was a good bottle. I reckon we'll have to Injun a little, but it kinda makes me happy, don't yuh know it."

They remained flattened against the walls for a while, but no more shots were fired. A cloudy sky blotted out the moon, which made it safe for them to leave their protection.

"Just what is our move, Skeeter Bill?" asked the judge. "It is likely that the bushwhacker still desires our demise."

"I dunno," confessed Skeeter softly, searching around on the floor for their candle and placing it on the table.

"I've got to see Tug Leeds for a minute or two, and then I'll—sh-h-h!"

Some one was walking boldly to the cabin, making no pretense of keeping quiet. Skeeter stepped in closer to the half-open door, covering the opening with his gun. A man stumbled on the crude step and grasped the side of the door.

"Sarg!" he called softly.

"Kinda close to yuh, pardner," said Skeeter Bill easily.

The man laughed.

"Thought I'd missed yuh, Sarg. This is McClung."

He stepped inside. Skeeter Bill scratched a match as he closed the door, and walked over to the candle.

"Didn't see no light, so I thought mebbe yuh was uptown," observed McClung, wiping his brow with the sleeve of his shirt.

"The mosquitoes were bad," explained the judge. "They're deadly enough in the dark and we don't intend to give them a light to work by."

"I dunno much about 'em," grinned McClung. "Never seen one in this country."

"Perhaps I was wrong," admitted the judge; "I am no bugologist, but I heard several of them humming and just drew a natural conclusion."

McClung looked curiously at Skeeter, who laughed.

"Somebody fired three shots through the door and one of 'em busted the light."

"In the dark?" asked McClung.

"Few minutes ago," assented Skeeter.

"Didn't amount to nothin', but kinda shows that a feller's home ain't sacred nowdays."

McClung smiled, but grew serious.

"Sarg, we gave you until tomorrow to decide about leadin' us, but the boys are at the Keystone cabin and they want to see yuh."

Skeeter looked at the judge, who was hanging a blanket over the one window. Suddenly the judge staggered back, as if from a heavy blow, and from the outside came the *whang* of a rifle.

The judge regained his balance and turned, a quizzical look on his frowsy face. He looked at Skeeter and McClung and pointed back at the window.

"Skeeter Bill—you—forgot—window—I—I—they—by—gad—it's—dark——"

He swayed forward and Skeeter Bill caught him in his arms and half-dragged him to the bed. McClung helped Skeeter remove the judge's old Prince Albert coat and the faded shirt. The bullet had torn its way completely through the shoulder, making a wicked wound.

"Lucky it was on the right side," muttered McClung.

Skeeter Bill's homely face was drawn with suffering as he looked down at his partner—his old drunken lawyer partner—and then he looked up at McClung.

"He can't make it, McClung," hoarsely. "He's all burnt up with whisky. Might as well hit him dead center."

Judge Tareyton gasped and opened his eyes. For a moment he seemed uncertain, but the blurred look faded from his eyes and he half-smiled up at Skeeter.

"I know you won't lie to me, Skeeter Bill," he said weakly. "Have I got a chance?"

Skeeter's eyes turned slowly away and the lines of his face seemed to harden to granite as he turned slowly back and looked down at the judge.

"Judge, that ain't a fair question. God A'mighty is the only one what can answer that. Old pardner, you've got a big hole in your right shoulder and your body ain't fit for a hard battle. You've still got a fightin' chance, but it's got to be fought with your brains."

Judge Tareyton smiled.

"Brains? Skeeter Bill, if I had brains I would still have a fighting body. You have been good to me, son. It appears that until now I have not realized how good you have been."

Skeeter Bill turned away, rubbing the palms of his hands on his hips. The blurred look came back to Judge Tareyton's eyes and he began to talk incoherently.

"Doc Brashear went to Ophir this afternoon," said McClung softly. "There ain't a soul what can help him, Sarg."

"Oh, ——, don't I know it?" groaned Skeeter. "He's just a drunken old law-shark, McClung, but he's my pardner. He's the only one what cares a —— about me. That shot was for me, don't yuh know it?"

Skeeter looked back at the bed for a moment and then turned to McClung.

"Friend, will yuh stay here with him for a little while? I dunno whether he'd like it or not, but I'm goin' to get that preacher. They use preachers when folks are passin' out, don't they?"

"They do when they can get 'em," agreed McClung.

Skeeter shifted his cartridge belt and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

"Mebbe this one won't want to come, but he'll come if I have to cripple his legs and pack him here."

Skeeter hurried to the Porter shack, but there was no one at home. Skeeter had no way of telling what time it was, but he knew that the minister must be at the Panhandle and that it would be a man-sized job to hold conversation with him in that place.

X

SUNBEAM had started in early on its nightly orgy. The yellow lights from the saloons and gambling-houses threw shadows out of which weaved miner and cowboy as they made their way from place to place. The rasping notes from fiddles, the discordant jangle of out-of-tune piano, blended with the raucous whoops from alcoholized vocal cords.

Skeeter Bill noticed that the larger crowd was at the Panhandle and he surmised that the sermon was the attraction. Straight to the doorway he went and squeezed his way inside. Luckily Skeeter was taller than most of the crowd, which gave him an almost unobstructed view of things.

On the performer's platform stood the minister, with Mary Leeds beside him. At the other end of the platform was the fiddler and piano player. Tug Leeds leaned against the piano, grinning at a half-nude dance-hall girl, who was just coming from the rear of the platform. She halted at the center and laughed down at the crowd, which yelped a welcome to her. Tug Leeds swung away from the piano and came to her side, where he held up his hand for silence.

"Gents, it's customary to open church with a song, ain't it? All right, we'll have the song."

The two-piece orchestra broke into the introduction of a vulgar honkatonk song—a song too unclean for sober minds. Skeeter Bill knew what it meant—knew what Tug Leeds was aiming at. He was going to disgust the minister. Mary Leeds' face was indistinct through the haze of tobacco smoke, but Skeeter could see her glance around as if seeking an avenue of escape. The minister moved closer to her, as though to protect her as much as possible.

The shrill voice of the singer began on the second verse, when Skeeter moved forward. No one gave him any heed except to swear at him for jostling them. Tug Leeds' gang were grouped close to the platform, enjoying the song, when Skeeter Bill shoved his way past the last man and sprang to the platform. The fiddler blocked his way, but Skeeter flung him aside and he fell off the edge of the platform into the crowd.

Tug Leeds leaned forward and stared at Skeeter, who stepped back until he had no one behind him. Skeeter swung a heavy pistol in his right hand as he faced the assemblage. Like a flash the singer darted back and disappeared to the rear of the platform. Not a sound came from the audience. Suddenly a man seemed to move. Like a flash Skeeter fired straight down into the front row of the crowd.

The heavy pistol seemed to shake the building—then absolute silence for a moment. A man spoke:

"By ——, that's shootin'! Cullop never moved, 'cept to go down."

"What do you want here?" asked Tug, and his voice was almost a croak.

Skeeter Bill never moved a muscle and his eyes were invisible slits, which seemed to hide the pupils completely, making it impossible to tell just where he was looking. His lips barely moved as he replied:

"Your hired murderer missed me and hit my pardner. I want the preacher to go and see him."

"Don't move, Tug," he gritted, as Leeds relaxed. "I'm takin' a little time on your case. 'Pears to me that I can't make up my mind whether to shoot yuh through the head and kill yuh all to once or to shoot your insides out one at a time and give me somethin' to laugh at."

From down in the crowd came a toneless laugh. Sandy McClain was standing on the front row, one arm still in a sling. The laugh jarred on Tug's nerves and he turned his head to glare at McClain.

Men began to ease out of the place, backing into each other in their haste to get out of range. The minister and Mary Leeds had turned and were staring at Skeeter.

"You want the preacher?" asked Tug hoarsely. "I ain't keepin' him, am I?" Tug's voice shrilled at the finish of the sentence.

"You dirty coyote!" Skeeter's voice was dangerously even. "You brought that preacher and the girl here to make 'em ashamed. You invited 'em to use this place for a church and then you makes 'em listen to a rotten song sung by a naked woman who ain't got no more shame than a buzzard."

Tug Leeds did not reply. From down on the floor in front of the crowd came a muffled curse. Some one had trampled on the fiddler's hand. Again came Sandy McClain's toneless chuckle. Skeeter Bill spoke directly to the minister.

"Go to my place as fast as yuh can and see if there's anythin' yuh can do for my pardner. Take the girl with yuh, and see if yuh can't find Mrs. Porter. This ain't no place for either of yuh. Git goin', can't yuh?"

The platform was built about three feet above the floor level and the entrance was at the rear, but the minister dropped to the floor and helped Mary Leeds down. The crowd parted to let them through, but closed in behind them again. Skeeter saw three of Leeds' men swing in behind them, but he was unable to stop them before the lane was choked with moving figures. For an instant Skeeter was off his guard, but it was enough.

Like a flash Tug Leeds grasped the back of the fiddler's chair and hurled it at Skeeter. Leeds was a powerful man and he threw the chair as an ordinary man would fling a cane. Skeeter whirled and fired, but the chair struck him across the face and hand, spoiling the shot. Before he could shoot again Leeds was into him with a rush and they went backward off the platform.

The crash of their fall shook the building, but they fell sidewise with neither man on top. A pistol flashed almost in Skeeter's face and the powder seared his cheek, but he broke Leeds' hold and plowed forward on his hands and knees. Men were kicking at him and more than one landed, but he managed to block them from his face. Above the yells of the attack came the slow *pop-pop-pop* of a pistol, as if some one were shooting deliberately.

Skeeter fought his way to his feet, crashing a man against the wall and securing his gun by main strength. He dashed the blood from his forehead, where he had cut it in the struggle for the gun, and whirled.

Against the side of the platform stood Sandy McClain, leaning on his injured arm, and as Skeeter looked he fired his last shot. A man slid against the wall, clawing for support and went down. From the packed crowd came a shot and McClain dropped his gun. He swayed for a moment, looked over toward Skeeter and spoke clearly:

"Go after Leeds, Sarg! He's got it framed to steal the girl for himself and then lead the vigilantes to hang you for it. You've spoiled his game, but he's tryin' to get her anyway."

Skeeter Bill shoved away from the wall, covering the remains of the crowd.

"Why do you tell me this, McClain?" asked Skeeter.

McClain laughed tonelessly, swaying on his feet.

"Go and get her, man. For——'s sake don't let Tug——"

He swayed to his knees and sat flat on the floor.

Skeeter backed to the door and sprang into the night. He had no idea of where to go. Blindly he ran to the Porter shack and flung the door open. Mrs. Porter, resplendent in a new hat, which was half-twisted on her head, her dress torn and soiled, as if she had been in a battle, was sitting rigidly in a home-made rocking-chair, staring into space.

"Where is that girl?" asked Skeeter breathlessly.

Mrs. Porter looked at him trance-like, and he went over and shook her roughly.

"Where is that girl?" he repeated.

"The stable!" Mrs. Porter's vocal cords suddenly came to life. "Tug Leeds' stable! I was near the door of the saloon when they came out. Two men grabbed her. I tried to stop them but they knocked me down." Mrs. Porter shook as if she had a chill, but continued. "Then Tug Leeds came running and helped them. I—I—they struck me when I screamed, but I saw them go to Tug's stable."

Skeeter Bill whirled and ran out. It was about three hundred yards to Leeds' stable and corral, but Skeeter covered the distance as if running for his life. Around the corral fence he ran and stopped just in time to keep from crashing into several saddled horses. Muffled voices came from inside the barn, and he could hear Tug Leeds' voice cursing harshly.

The door was flung open and the three came out, carrying a muffled figure. Skeeter was standing on the right side of the horse, motionless as a statue. The men came up to the left side of the animal.

"Is this the right horse?" asked Tug.

"Uh-huh," growled one of the men.

"Well, rope her on good," ordered Tug. "Tie her feet to the stirrups and under the horse's belly and then tie her to cantle and horn. I hope to —— that somebody killed Sarg. He busted up a good thing for me, —— him! Now, we've all got to leave. Anyway, I got that old booze fightin' lawyer."

Not a sound came from the muffled figure as they hoisted it to the saddle.

"Go around and rope the other side, Allen," said Leeds.

Skeeter stepped in close to the horse, and as Allen came up from under the horse's neck Skeeter brought the barrel of his six-shooter down across his head. Allen dropped without a sound.

"What in —— was that?" asked Leeds.

Skeeter reached out, picked up the reins and with a swift spring swung on behind the saddle. As his left leg whirled across he felt the toe of his boot strike a man in the head.

Came a muffled curse, and the flash of a pistol lit up the scene. The horse whirled sidewise, snorting with fear, and bucked viciously. It was probably its first experience in carrying double and it resented it with every muscle in its body.

Skeeter grasped the swaying figure in both arms, locked his heels into the animal's flanks and rode as he had never ridden before. They crashed into the corral fence and the horse stumbled to its knees, but floundered back into its stride and pitched straight ahead in the dark, while behind them came curses and pistol shots.

Skeeter had no control over the bucking horse, as he had to devote all his time to keeping himself and the blanketed figure in the saddle from being thrown. He was forced to drop his gun. Leeds and his men had selected a powerful horse—a horse well versed in the arts of bucking, and Skeeter was riding under a handicap. He was unable to judge the future actions of the animal, unable to see where they were going.

Suddenly the animal seemed to spin in the air, came the crash of splintering poles and the horse and its riders came down in a tangle. The horse had bucked sidewise into a pole corral.

Skeeter rolled loose from the tangle, dazedly trying to prevent the horse from regaining its feet. He knew that Mary Leeds' right foot must be tied to a stirrup and that he must not let the horse get up. Suddenly he realized that the horse was making no effort to rise. It was but the work of a moment to remove the ropes from the stirrup and drag her away from the saddle.

He found a match and scratched it on his boot heel. From the folds of a large blanket Mary Leeds' frightened eyes looked up into his face.

"Skeeter Bill," she whispered painfully.

"One and the same," grinned Skeeter painfully. "We sure do meet in the ——est places, don't we, ma'am."

As the match flickered out he saw her eyes close and her body relax.

XI

SKEETER could hear horses running and the hoarse cry of a man, trying to give an order. A running horse passed them and swung to the left beyond the corral fence. Skeeter got to his feet. He was bruised and wrenched and one sleeve of his shirt was missing. He shook the haze from his brain and leaned against the fence.

Skeeter knew that Leeds would not give up trying to get the girl and he laughed foolishly as he thought of Tug Leeds trying to kidnap his own daughter. Then he thought of Judge Tareyton. Events had happened so fast that he had forgotten his old partner.

He picked up the inert figure of the girl and stumbled around the corral, tripping over loose poles in his haste. Shadowy outlines of buildings gave him direction and he weaved toward his shack. He saw the door open and a man went inside, leaving the door half-open. The figure looked big and unreal, as it bulked into the doorway, blotting out the candlelight.

Into the doorway stumbled Skeeter Bill with his burden and stopped, letting the girl half-slide to the floor. Mary Leeds was conscious again and grasped Skeeter for support. Skeeter stared around the room. On the bed was the judge, his face as gray as his unkempt hair. The gross appearance seemed to have left his features—bringing back the old lines of character. The blanket had been pulled to his chin and, except for his eyes, he was as motionless as though dead.

Skeeter's eyes shifted to McClung, who was standing near the head of the bed, his hands raised as high as his shoulders. Skeeter turned quickly. Standing between him and the door was Tug Leeds, a pistol in each hand and a sneering grin on his face. Mary Leeds shuddered as she clung to Skeeter.

"You was so —— strong for religion, Sarg; go ahead and pray."

Tug Leeds' voice was quivering with anger. He stepped slowly around, as if afraid some one might come to the door behind him.

Skeeter Bill made no move. Tug had McClung's gun, and Tug knew that every one in the room was at his mercy. Skeeter Bill glanced back at the judge, whose burning eyes were fastened on Tug Leeds.

"Where is the preacher?" asked Skeeter softly.

Tug Leeds laughed aloud and without turning his head, pointed toward the corner, where Skeeter could see the crumpled figure of a man.

"Tried to tell me my business," sneered Tug.

"Well, what do yuh aim to do?" asked Skeeter bluntly.

Tug laughed mockingly.

"You won't care, Sarg. No, you won't care, 'cause you won't see it —— you, you've ruined me in Sunbeam, but it ain't goin' to be no satisfaction to you; *sabe?* I don't mind tellin' you that I'm goin' to take that girl with me.

"I ain't got a —— bit of use for her, Sarg. I can get all the girls I want—plenty of 'em. You've crossed me and I'm doin' this to make you pay, do yuh understand? When

I get through with her she can blame you for it all, and I want you to die knowin' that I'm doin' this—not because I want the girl, but because I want to get even with you."

Skeeter looked down at the terrified eyes of Mary Leeds and back at Tug's grinning face.

"You can't take her, Tug." Skeeter's voice was cold as ice. "You can kill me, but yuh can't take her."

"Can't I?" laughed Tug. "Who will stop me?"

"You will," said Skeeter wearily.

Tug leaned closer, his knuckles white around the butt of the heavy caliber pistol.

"I will? Whatcha mean?" Tug's voice was barely above a whisper. "Talk—can'tcha?"

Skeeter Bill looked at Mary Leeds.

"I've gotta do it, ma'am. I don't want no hurt to come to yuh, but I reckon the hurt is less this way.

"He lifted his eyes and stared at Tug Leeds for a moment, and then:

"Tug, you —— near made a big mistake. This girl——"

The shack seemed to shake with a muffled explosion. Skeeter whirled toward the bed, where a cloud of smoke eddied from under the corner of the blanket and a tiny spiral mounted from a torn, smudgy spot just over where the judge's hand would be.

Beyond a slight jerk, Tug Leeds did not move for a moment. His hand unclasped from the butt of his pistol, which had covered Skeeter, and it fell to the floor. The other pistol dropped from his left hand and he looked foolishly around.

"Well," he whispered, as if in agreement, "well—that—is—finished—" and fell slowly, as a tree falls.

Skeeter swept the two guns from the floor, looked down at Tug Leeds and then stepped quickly over to the bed, smothering out the fire from Judge Tareyton's pistol. He looked down at the judge, who was trying to speak.

"Skeeter Bill," he whispered painfully, "I had to do it to save you both. Keep smiling, son, and don't forget that God put a spark in you—a spark that will flare up and build a big flame for you—if you let it. I never gave mine a chance, but——"

He tried to lift himself a trifle, but sank back.

"Skeeter Bill, the preacher was right, when he said it was a dim place. Yes, by gad, it's getting awful dim."

He smiled up at Skeeter and his voice was barely audible.

"I—I—guess—the—old—lamp—needs—oil."

Skeeter turned away, his eyes blurred. A man stumbled though the door and stopped near the middle of the room. It was Sandy McClain, hatless, almost shirtless, with a smear of blood across his face and chest. His eyes stared vacantly around the room and came to rest on the prone figure of Tug Leeds.

Mary Leeds stepped in close to Skeeter and grasped him by the arm.

"What—who is that man," she asked, pointing to Tug. "What were you going to tell him? Who is he?"

"Somebody beat me to it," said McClain in a hollow voice, shaking his head sadly. "I kinda wanted to kill Tug Leeds myself. I—I wanted to—honestly."

"Tug Leeds?" asked Mary foolishly, looking up at Skeeter. "Tug Leeds?"

Skeeter nodded.

"Yes, ma'am. I reckon you've got to know it sometime."

"My father?"

Mary Leeds moved forward, staring down at the body of Tug Leeds. Sandy McClain stared at her, open-mouthed, vacantly. He looked at Skeeter Bill and back at her.

Mary turned to Skeeter.

"Why—why didn't somebody tell me that he was my father?"

McClain stepped closer to her, peering at her face.

"What is your name?" he asked slowly. "Your name?"

"Mary Leeds."

Sandy McClain stared at her—stared at her as if she was a ghost. A look of wonderment flashed across his face and he glanced quickly around the room. His lips twitched for a moment and he turned back to the girl.

"What was your mother's name?"

"Jane."

"Jane Holden."

"Yes," said Mary Leeds wonderingly. "My father's name was James Leeds."

"He was a thief," said McClain slowly. "He was sent West to buy a lot of cattle, but he—" McClain stopped and looked around. "That was years ago and the West was a long ways from the East. He went back East and lied to those men. He told them that he had been robbed—that a man had impersonated him and cashed the checks. They sent him to prison."

Mary Leeds looked down at Tug Leeds and shook her head, while the tears ran down her cheeks. She threw out her arms in a gesture of weariness.

"That was not true," she said brokenly. "I have been trying to find him and tell him it isn't true, but now——'

"What was that?" exclaimed McClain. "Wasn't true?"

"No, it wasn't true. One of the men—a man who knew he was going West with that money, and who followed and helped rob him—died over a year ago, but before he died he confessed enough to clear my father's name. But my father escaped from prison the night of that confession."

Mary Leeds dropped on her knees beside Tug Leeds' body and sobbed brokenly. Sandy McClain, wounded outlaw, laughed hollowly, foolishly. Skeeter Bill stepped in close to him, thinking that McClain had lost his mind, but McClain shoved away from him and weaved over to Mary.

"Get up," he croaked, and Mary looked appealingly up at him. "Get up! My ——, don't waste tears on that carrion. That man is the one who impersonated your father. Don't you hear me? He took the name of Leeds and he's never been able to change it."

"This man is not my father?" Mary Leeds got to her feet and stared around. "Not—my—father?"

McClain shook his head.

"No. I knowed your father, Miss. Me and him was in the same penitentiary. That man—" he pointed at Tug Leeds' body—"that man wasn't fit to oil his boots. He ruined your father and ended by killing him."

"What do yuh mean?" gasped Skeeter Bill.

McClain pointed to the bunk.

"Judge Tareyton was James Leeds. I knew his story. My time was up a few days after he escaped."

McClain finished his explanation and turned toward the door, where a crowd of miners were coming in, headed by Jerry Byler and Dick Franklyn. They stopped and stared at the body of Tug Leeds. The old minister had got to his feet and was looking weakly around, a welter of blood on his gray hair, where Tug had hit him with a gun.

"Boys," said McClung," I reckon there ain't much use for a vigilance committee now. Dick your pardner was the head of the whole gang."

"We kinda cleaned up up-town," nodded Franklyn. "That feller Cullop told us a few things before he cashed in and we rounded up all the rest—cripples and all. Sunbeam is rid of outlaws, Mac—thanks to Sarg."

"Thanks to Sarg," said Skeeter Bill slowly. "Boys, I've lost my pardner—my old drunken lawyer pardner. I asks yuh to see that he gets p-planted right—preacher and all. He wasn't much to anybody—but me, don't yuh see—not while he was alive. I—I reckon I'll say *adios* to yuh all, folks."

Skeeter Bill turned and started for the door. The miners stepped aside to let him pass out, but McClung stopped him at the threshold.

"Sarg, you ain't goin' to leave Sunbeam, are yuh?"

Skeeter smiled wistfully and nodded.

"Sunbeam has got to be clean, McClung—clean of outlaws. There's two left. McClain is entitled to your thanks for what he done tonight, and I know danged well he'll go straight if yuh give him a chance—and a doctor.

"The other one—" he stopped and glanced back at the figure on the bed—"the other one don't want no thanks—not till he works that little spark up to a decent-sized blaze. He's goin' now—thanks to Sarg."

He stepped quickly outside and went around the corner toward his little barn. The miners poured question after question at Mary and McClung, but the girl shoved them away and ran to the door.

"Skeeter Bill!" she called. "Skeeter Bill!"

The crowd edged in behind her, wonderingly, silently listening for a reply.

A few moments later it came—a *diminuendo* of galloping hoofs. Skeeter Bill Sarg was heading for the desert, following a star, which was, as yet, only a tiny spark.

The Cook

by Frederick Moore

Author of "White Man's Magic," "Fool's Luck," etc.

IT WAS a night of thick and chilling fog, and the San Francisco ferry-boats were roaring at one another to look sharp and keep out of the way as they felt for their slips with the luminous fingers of their searchlights. Now and then a deep-throated tramp steamer howled a warning, and the fog-horn of Goat Island bellowed with tiresome regularity.

Over all these sounds, there came to the Battleship Lunch of Sinker Joe on the water-front, the irritable yelpings of taxicab and automobile horns disputing the road as they scuttled up and down the Embarcadero like great luminous-eyed beetles lost in the murk.

Pete, the colored cook, was frying some fish for himself. The supper trade was over for the evening, and the place was deserted. Sinker Joe, the Greek owner, was in the back room playing cards with a crony. The glowing cooking-range, in sight of the lunch-counter, gave off a comfortable heat.

The room was filled with a smoky haze which was spiced with the odors of the fried fish, steak and onions and vegetable stews of the preceding busy hour. And the coffee-heater dispensed the aroma of Brazilian coffee.

Pete was a frail little man. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, revealing slender forearms. Doubled about his middle twice was a white but spotted apron, of such ample proportions that it betrayed the fact that it was not made for cooks who are of thin bodies.

About his head he wore a white napkin, the corners of the cloth being tucked in about his ears with skilful fingers. It had a twist to it that suggested a turban.

Pete moved about the range with marvelous grace. There was a swiftness and a surety about his hands that was amazing. He was as quick as a cat, even when there was no need for haste. But tonight he was inclined to hug the range, for the chill of the fog penetrated the Battleship Lunch, and Pete felt shivery. He was a quiet man, given to holding his peace and doing his work without argument, even when he was jeered by drunken roustabouts of the docks who presumed to give themselves lordly airs with Pete if they had the few cents needed to buy a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

He had just flipped his fish into a plate and was about to eat his supper, when the door opened and two men came in. The first was a short, heavy-set man who wore a double-breasted reefing jacket of dark blue, an old visored cap with a brass button on each side, and a white cotton shirt with a soft collar carelessly held in place by a red tie. His tanned face was raw-boned and seamed with the deep wrinkles of ill-humor. But his neck was fat and bulging, and the skin of it was covered with tiny red veins. He was Captain Gedge, known to everybody on the water-front as a blustering skipper of sailing-vessels.

With Gedge was a tall and lanky man

"The Cook," copyright, 1922, by Frederick Moore.

with thoughtful gray eyes and unobtrusive manner—Filson, who went as mate with Gedge and managed somehow to get on with him in spite of the captain's irascibility. Filson was a New Englander who had learned his seamanship in fishing-fleets on the Newfoundland Banks.

"Put me on a thick steak, and see that you have it well done but not burned, black boy," growled Gedge as he straddled the disk of a seat before the counter. And he added sharply, "If you burn it I'll throw it through your hide."

With this he pushed back his cap and revealed thick black hair shot with gray—hair worn overlong and inclined to curl. He grinned insolently at Pete, as if behind the violence of his words there was a pleasant personality and he meant no offense. Nevertheless, under his leering grin plenty of men knew there was hidden a ruthless cruelty.

Pete gave a slight nod and turned toward the cutting-table for a steak, picking up a big knife.

Filson sat down beside the skipper and quietly told the cook to fry some eggs in butter with a slice of ham.

"Don't cut the bone out of that meat!" warned Captain Gedge as he watched Black Pete trim the steak. "I eat mine bones and all, black feller!"

"Yes," said Pete, without looking up.

He spoke half in assent to what the captain had said, and half-questioningly, as if he rather doubted what Gedge had said about eating bones. He threw the steak on the hot pan, and while it sizzled he broke the eggs into another pan for Filson.

"When I give you an order I want a proper answer," roared Gedge. "I don't stand for any nigger 'yessing' me that way! You put a 'sir' on when you speak to me! My name is Gedge, and I'm white! Understand!"

Pete was busy with the eggs, and did not answer at once. Gedge reached for a bottle of catchup and flung it at the cook. Pete's wary eye saw the flying bottle in time and dodged; but it struck the zinc wall above the stove, and the red contents spattered the cook's white shirt and apron, his napkin-cap and his face. The fragments of the bottle landed in among clean cups and plates on a shelf over the stove.

Pete turned and looked at Gedge, and for a fraction of a second there was a flicker of his eyelashes which revealed a deep anger. But his light-brown features were perfectly immobile.

"Yes, sir, cap'en," he said, and then reached for a napkin and wiped the catchup from his face.

"All right, then, you've learned that little lesson," growled Gedge and turned to Filson to speak of matters which concerned business.

Sinker Joe came out from the back room, mild surprize on his swarthy face. He gave Pete an inquiring look, let his eyes rove for an instant over the wreckage on the shelf, and then grinned at Gedge.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Gedge to the Greek. "I had to show your nigger manners. I'll pay for the damage—I always pay for my fun."

"It'll be a dollar," said Sinker Joe blandly as he put his elbows down on the counter. "I think mebbe you was sail away from us today, Captain Gedge."

"No," said Gedge. "We didn't sail, but we'll git away in the morning if things work out right."

He fished a silver dollar from his pocket and slammed it down on the counter.

"For where you sail to thees time?" asked Sinker Joe as he picked up the dollar.

"Tangeru," said Gedge. "A copra-planter out there has bought the schooner *Seeker*. I'm to take her out there and deliver her— Here, you!" cried the captain as he saw that Black Pete was not attending to the steak, but was listening to the conversation. "Watch that steak of mine! I'll do the talking here—and the listening, too! Look sharp, or I'll hit you the next time I heave something at you!"

Pete turned to his cooking, but he was on the alert when Gedge went on with his talk to the Greek.

"I need a cook," said Gedge. "Had one, but he jumped ship on me the last minute. But for that I'd been outside before this fog, —— him! And he had an advance, too. We're going up to the Dutchman's to see if we can ship a cook now."

Pete spoke without turning from the stove.

"I'll go cook for you, cap'en," he said quietly.

"What's that?" demanded Gedge in astonishment.

"I'll go cook for you, sir," said Pete once more.

"You'll go cook for me!"

Gedge turned and stared at Filson as if in doubt about what Pete had said and the mate must verify what the captain's ears had heard. Then a smile of appreciation broke over his face, and he thumped his hand down on the counter with such force that the vinegar cruets all leaped from the board.

"Now that's the ticket!" he cried. "I heave a bottle at a black, and he wants to go cook for me! Who says a nigger don't know a master when he sees one? Pete, you're black, and you know your place. That's the kind of a cook I want, —— my eyes!"

The Greek edged back alongside Black Pete; and, turning, he said in a low voice:

"You are a fool! I pay you well, and you want to go to sea with this man! You are crazy!"

Gedge grinned. It suited his present humor to take Sinker Joe's cook away from him. So the captain prodded Filson in the ribs, as if there was the beginning of a gorgeous joke on the Greek restaurant owner—and on Pete.

"Can't your nigger go where he wants to?" demanded Gedge. "You don't own him, do you? What is this place? A slave joint? You foreigners think that when you pay wages to a man he's your property like a truck-horse! What business is it of yours what Black Pete wants to do, if it suits him and he's paid for it, hey?"

The Greek scowled at Gedge and waddled through the curtain which shut off his living-quarters from the restaurant.

Gedge turned his attention to Pete.

"Have you ever been to sea?" he demanded.

Pete now brought the captain's steak.

"Yes, sir," he said. "When I was younger I was in a ship a long time. I don't like it here. You say, sir, you will go to Tangeru?"

"Sure," said Gedge. "But I won't bring you back. You'll sign for the passage out, with a bonus for passage money up to Manila. You'll have to git a new ship there. I'm taking this schooner out to her new owners."

"I'll go, sir," said Pete.

He took off his apron and his napkin-cap and threw them over a line on which towels were drying.

"You know how to make up your mind, I'll say that for you," said Gedge. "It's all settled."

The Greek came shuffling out again. He had evidently been listening behind the curtain, for he was sulky. He stood frowning at Pete, and then snatched the apron off the line and tied it about himself.

"The *Seeker* is right across the road there," said Gedge, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb in the direction of the fog-hidden docks across the Embarcadero. "Be aboard in twenty minutes if you want to go, cook—we won't bother about the commissioner; you can go on the name of the grub-spoiler who jumped out on me."

"Yes, sir," and Pete disappeared through the curtain into the back room with the obvious intention of packing his goods and quitting the Battleship Lunch without more ado.

Gedge and Filson finished their meals hastily and paid the disgruntled Greek, whereupon they slipped out into the fog and made their way toward the pier where the *Seeker* was lying.

Black Pete came out through the curtain with a bundle slung over his shoulder, and wearing a coat and hat.

"For why you go?" Sinker Joe assailed him. "Have I not been like a father for you seex year? And you talk the English better as I do after the school of nights! For why you leave me, now that this man of ——, Gedge, comes by my place?"

"You have been good, yes," said Pete with something of sadness in his voice and manner. "But I am tired of the city, I am tired of the cold fogs, I am tired of the land. The time has come for me to go."

"But that —— Gedge!" cried the Greek, his anger growing over the captain winning away the cook. "If you likes to go to sea—go! But not with Gedge. He is—Oh, you black men have nothing of sense in your heads! Gedge! Everybody knows Gedge! He is a bad man!"

"Yes, I know—but I don't care," said Pete wearily.

He looked about the restaurant as if he knew this was the last time he should see it—the grimy walls, the stale odors of cooked food, the faded and dirty placards and posters pinned to the dingy, painted plaster.

The Greek threw his hands over his head

in a gesture of disgust, stepped to the little cash-register and rang it with a sharp clang. He drew out some money and counted it.

"I pay you to the end of the week," he said softly, and handed over the money. "I think you never will leave me, and now you go with this murdering sailor. I say he will kill you."

Pete lifted his shoulders in a careless shrug.

"That may be true," he said. "But, Joe—I need a change."

"Then when you come back, your job is good with me," said the Greek and thrust out his hand in forgiveness.

The cook grasped it and then moved around the end of the counter toward the door. He opened it, paused an instant as if he realized that he was making a mistake which he would regret.

"So long, Joe," he said, and swiftly departed, bent forward under his bundle.

The Greek stood in the window and watched Black Pete cross the Embarcadero and disappear into the fog in the direction of the hazy outline of the bare poles of a schooner sticking up out of the enveloping murk.

FOR days the *Seeker* sought the sunsets that eluded her over the horizons ahead; for nights she drove over a moonlit sea, southing, southing into warmed winds while the stars grew larger, and new constellations reeled overhead, and the islands swimming past threw up their fronded peaks and their mottled sides, thick with the fecund foliage of the tropics.

Captain Gedge was happy. He had some one upon whom he could spill the spleen of his meanness. Black Pete, patient and willing with his work, was but a plaything all this time for the moods of the skipper, who was often in quarrelsome humor. Yet Pete never, by so much as the quiver of an eyelash, showed any resentment of Gedge's insults and abuse.

"You're a —— of a smart nigger," said Gedge one day as he sat at the cabin table and Pete was clearing up after a meal. "You thought you'd ship with me just to show you didn't fear me. Well, before this cruise is over you'll be afraid of me all right."

"I *am* afraid of you, sir," said Pete. "I'm scared, true I am, sir."

"Not half what you will be," promised Gedge with a grin. "I know your kind—think you're good as a white man because you've got half a white man's brain. But a white man's civilization is too good for you, Pete."

"Maybe I've got some white blood," said Pete. "I'm not sure, sir. I don't see that it does me any good, sir."

"Don't argue with me!" cried Gedge, thumping the table. "I told you white man's civilization is too good for you!"

"I'm agreeing with you, sir. But I say it this way—I'm not good enough for the white man's civilization. Is that my fault, sir?"

Gedge squinted at him thoughtfully.

"Oh, is that so?" he sneered. "You think, eh? I'd have you know I'll do the thinking aboard here. You're one of the educated kind, and you think you know how to hold your temper. Hold your temper with *that!*" and he hove a half-empty bowl of stew—bowl and all—into the black cook's face.

Pete staggered back, his lip cut and his eyes filled with the stew, which also covered his front. He cleaned up the mess but said nothing. As Gedge sat and grinned at him, Pete continued to be the same calm, stoical, docile black he had been from the first night he had gone aboard the *Seeker*. He finished his work and hid away in his galley.

Filson got down into the cabin in time to see Pete cleaning the floor, and to understand what had happened. And when Pete was gone the mate warned the skipper.

"He'll let a knife into you, sir, if you don't watch out. He's one of the quiet kind—treacherous, you know, sir."

"That's what I can't stand, his —— quiet!" raged Gedge.

"Don't press him too far, sir. You never know what a cook will do if he gets off his nut."

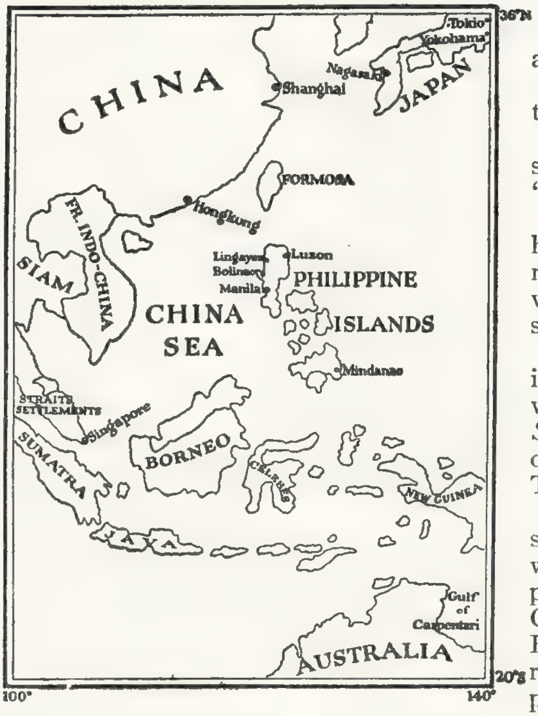
"I'll press him to the breaking point," growled Gedge, plowing his fingers through his long hair. "I'll think up something that'll make him turn and fight."

That was an end of it for the time, but as the *Seeker* pushed farther into southern waters, the captain brooded sulkily over the fact that Pete preserved his same calm and self-possessed demeanor. Gedge seemed to spend his time devising methods of tormenting Pete which should make the black cook beg for mercy.

"I'll fix up a plan to make him blubber like a baby," Gedge told Filson. "I'll fetch him to his black knees, blast him! He can't be around me and give me that cold, smooth eye of his. He's sticking it out because he knows that's what drives me into a fury."

And as the days passed, his desire to have revenge became an obsession with him.

Once when the *Seeker* lay becalmed under a flaming sky, and a pitiless sun was fairly cooking the tar out of her deck-seams, Gedge hit upon a scheme. The cabin was like a furnace, and a sensible skipper would not have asked a cook to keep up a fire in the galley that day. But Gedge kept Pete at his cooking, getting ready various dishes till noon.



"Heat will break his spirit," the skipper boasted to Filson.

Pete's sleeping-quarters were in a tiny closet-like cabin just off the galley. But there was no door between. In the early afternoon Gedge made Pete lie down on the shelf of a bunk—and shut the galley door which led into the main cabin. Then the captain built up a prodigious fire and got out. And Pete was all but baked by the terrific, stifling heat.

Gedge, stripped to the waist, entered the galley at intervals and replenished the fire. Between times he had buckets of water thrown over him. Outside on deck the hot planks were being drenched with sea water to give relief from the blinding heat of the sun.

"Do you find this weather suited to your black hide?" asked the grinning Gedge, as he looked in on the cook.

"I can stand it, sir," replied the tortured Pete.

"Say it's hot, and maybe I'll let up," said Gedge finally when he saw that the cook had no idea of whining.

"I've seen it hotter, sir," gasped Pete.

"The trouble with you is, you belong in a —— jungle!" growled Gedge, and gave up.

Filson was worried. That evening he took occasion again to warn the skipper.

"That black boy'll git you before he's shut of the schooner, sir," he told Gedge. "I don't like the look in his eye, sir."

"Git me?" said Gedge. "All right, let him try it. But I'll bet that before we make our landfall for Tangeru, I'll find his weak spot—just what will make him squeal."

But in the next few days Gedge did nothing much to torment the cook, and affairs were running along smoothly aboard the *Seeker* when she made land dead ahead one morning—the coast of the island of Tangeru.

The skipper hauled in close to land, which surprized Filson, for the town of Tangeru was to the south of a long and mountainous peninsula. At first Filson presumed that Gedge had missed his proper landfall. But as they drew in toward shore, Filson realized that the skipper was not in any particular hurry to get into port and deliver the schooner.

Just before sundown Captain Gedge sailed the *Seeker* into a little bay, and anchored in eight fathoms. At once there was a clamor of voices in the jungle-clad hillsides, and the dull booming of gongs.

Proas slipped out of the river up in the toe of the bay and paddled out around the schooner, though the natives were wary and did not approach her closer than what they supposed to be pistol-shot.

"Those —— are a bad lot, sir," said Filson nervously to Gedge. "I don't think it's oversafe to lay in here during the night. They'll be aboard us if they work up their courage, and they think they see a chance to catch us off guard. And there's a —— raft of 'em up in the hills, too."

"Serve out a couple of shotguns to the crew," said Gedge. "If we keep a good watch and bang away at any proa that comes too close and gets too thick, they'll be willing enough to keep their distance."

Filson went forward, and had a talk with the bosun.

"Sometimes I think the skipper's plumb crazy," said the mate.

"I'd call it just double-bottomed meanness, sir," said the bosun, who had been a mate with Filson when the latter was master of a bark.

"He's in here till he plans out some deviltry on the cook," went on Filson. "He knows Pete will be discharged when we git into port, and the skipper hasn't made the black boy squeal. I'm sorry for Pete—hard to tell what'll happen before we git clear of this bay."

The sun went down, and the moon popped up over the hills. Fires flickered in the brush up on the hills, revealing the fact that there was a good-sized native village above the beach. The gongs kept going lazily, and were answered from far up the valleys which cut into the mountains toward the port of Tangeru.

There was a large gathering of natives on the beach, and a couple of proas idled on the moonlit water some three hundred yards off the *Seeker*. The men in the proas kept calling to the crowd on shore, as if reporting conditions aboard the schooner; and the natives ashore broke out into choruses of gabbling, as if they were arguing among themselves and discussing the possibility of taking the schooner.

After mess that evening Black Pete had occasion to step out on deck and dump overside a panful of refuse from the galley. The stuff stuck in the pan, and Pete had to rap the pan smartly to clear it of the sticky contents.

But that rapping of the pan seemed to hush the gongs ashore, though the gabble greatly increased. After several minutes a single gong ashore began to boom out, dully and intermittently, and in a short time also lapsed into silence.

Black Pete came out again with a pan of waste, and dumped it into the sea. Then, with a big iron spoon, he tapped the pan in imitation of the gong that had been sounding ashore, as if to mock the natives. Some of the crew forward laughed at Pete.

"Give 'em a good razzle-dazzle, Petey," said one of the sailors from the gloom of the forecastle head. "They're not the only Swiss bell-ringers in the world. That dishpan of yours makes 'em nervous."

So for several minutes Pete beat a tattoo on his pan. The gong ashore boomed when he was silent, whereupon Pete gave it back to them—as good as they sent, and a little better.

"What the —— is this?" demanded Gedge, coming out on deck.

"Just making fun, sir. A little joke with those black boys on the beach."

Gedge burst out in laughter, but it was not the laughter of mirth; instead, the captain revealed his malevolent glee at having caught Pete at something which could be turned against the cook.

"That's awful funny," he said. "It's a great joke to stir those black boys up like you have! And look at the two proas paddling in on us to see what this is all about!"

The pair of proas which had been hanging off the *Seeker* were now drawing in cautiously toward the schooner, the paddlers talking among themselves in low tones, but evidently excited.

"Sheer off!" bawled Gedge to the natives, and as they stopped at sound of his voice, he fired twice at them with a revolver.

They headed away for the beach as swiftly as they could make their boats travel.

"You've put the schooner and all of us in danger," resumed Gedge to the cook. "I'm going to flog you for it. Mr. Filson, fetch a couple of deck-lights! Bosun, trice the cook up by the thumbs to the main-rigging and I'll dress him down proper. I've had enough of his nigger insolence, and I'll make him pay for it now, or my name's not Gedge."

With that the skipper went to his cabin.

Filson hesitated. He was inclined to tell the captain that he'd have no hand in the business of mistreating the cook, but realized that Gedge was determined upon punishing Pete. So he drew near the cook, and whispered to him as the bosun came up to carry out the skipper's orders.

"The cap'en has made an excuse of your

foolishness in beating the pan, Pete," he said. "Afore he's done with you he may kill you. I know him better'n you do—once he gits an idea into his head, there's no stopping him. If you're wise you'll yell when he gives you the rope. That's all he's aiming to do—make you yelp like a dog. You hark to what I say, and give him a good squeal. We'll be in Tangeru to-morrow anyway, and you'll be alive if you beg for mercy."

"I understand, sir," said Pete, and submitted his hands to the bosun to be bound.

Then a line was rove through the main-shrouds, and Pete's hands were snugged up to the ratlines till his toes barely touched the deck.

Gedge was out by this time, carrying a cat-o'-nine-tails, made from heaving-line—a hard-laid line as supple as a ribbon but its body as hard as wire.

Though the moon was bright, Gedge ordered Filson and the bosun to hold lanterns up to Pete's face so the captain would be able to observe the effect of his punishment on the cook.

"Cap'en, please don't whip me," said Pete quietly.

"Not such a gay bird now, eh?" snarled Gedge, and, reaching out, grasped the cook's light cotton shirt at the neck and ripped it off him.

Then he stepped back and swung his many-lashed whip with all his strength upon the naked back of the cook.

Pete screamed, and then broke out into an incoherent torrent of pleading, twisting his body about. At that there came mutterings of protest from some of the crew.

"Less noise for'ard!" roared Gedge. "If I hear any more I'll serve some of you the same!"

He brought the whip into play again, snorting through his nostrils like an enraged animal as he struck out.

Once more Pete cried out in agony, but Gedge did not take any rest between blows. He rained the whip unceasingly upon the black man's back.

"I think that's enough, sir!" cried Filson, and interposed himself between Gedge and the cook so as to interrupt the swing of Gedge's arm.

But Gedge slipped aside and slashed at Pete wildly. He had a taste of savage cruelty, and his appetite for it had been whetted by days of brooding over Pete's calm resistance to the torments he had devised.

"That's enough, sir! That's enough!" warned Filson, trying to push Gedge out of reach of Pete.

The mate did manage to keep him out of reach of the cook, and the bosun contrived to get himself in the way. By this time the muttering crew was gathering near.

The bosun dared to cut the lashing, and Pete dropped to the deck, limp and bleeding. Gedge struggled with Filson to get in reach of the cook, and finally Filson and the bosun dragged the skipper into the main-cabin, snarling like a madman, and slashing right and left with the whip. Filson wrenched it out of his hands.

"You'll kill him, and then be hanged, sir," said Filson. "Don't go too far—or the crew——"

"I'm master here!" bawled Gedge, and he thrust the mate and the bosun away.

Then, running out on deck again, he shrieked at Pete:

"Git out of this ship. I said I'd make you squeal, and I have. But I don't want any squealers aboard me! You're so —— crazy to play the tom-tom—git ashore before——"

"That means death, sir," cautioned Filson. "The natives ashore are head-hunters."

"He belongs in the jungle!" raged Gedge. "I'll log him as having jumped overboard and deserted. Any man aboard who wants to argue about it, I'll hold his pay up in Manila. There's no consul in Tangeru.

"This nigger ain't fit to mix with white men. Give him his blasted dishpan and let him go to his own kind—that, or I'll trice him up again and beat him to death!"

Pete staggered to his feet and stumbled forward along the bulwark. He kicked off his slippers and shed his trousers, and before anybody knew what he was about, he dived overboard and began to swim for the beach.

Filson and the crew stood and watched Pete's body cutting through the smooth, moonlit water of the bay. Gedge gave a snort of triumph and went back to his cabin, cursing and throwing things about.

But Filson felt as if he had had a hand in murder. He was sure that Pete would not survive long, even if he reached shore. He watched the cook's head disappear into the shadows of the mangrove-trees and the coco-palms.

Soon after there was a medley of wild yells. Filson believed the natives had started in pursuit of the cook and were chasing him into the jungle.

After that there was comparative quiet ashore, though the gongs resumed their booming far up in the hills; but lazily, as if what they had to communicate was of little import. Filson remained on watch all night.

As for Gedge, he turned in and snored. At daylight he was still sleeping heavily, as if drunk or drugged. The captain was ordinarily a light sleeper, yet Filson had difficulty in rousing him that morning.

He had little to say, but was surprizingly agreeable, though there were no signs of remorse in his manner. He did not mention the cook, and so far as Filson knew, never paid any attention to the lonely beach. He was indifferent to the cook's fate.

THEY got a gentle breeze off the land and filled away for Tangeru. Early in the afternoon the *Seeker* was safe in the port of Tangeru and tied up at a jetty which ran out from a zinc warehouse belonging to the company of copra exporters which had bought the schooner.

There was a barkentine—the *Peerless*—almost ready to sail for Manila. Gedge and his crew were to go to Manila in her as passengers; and the crew of the *Seeker* transferred their dunnage to the *Peerless*, while Gedge went down the beach about a mile to the plantation-house to draw his own pay and the pay of his crew. He also had to turn over the documents relating to the transfer of ownership of the *Seeker*.

Filson took a walk ashore in the bamboo village above the warehouses. He was thoroughly disgusted with Gedge, and was thinking of quitting the captain when they reached Manila.

"You better keep in sight of the jetty," warned Benson, the foreman of the pressing-works. "The beach is safe enough, but out toward the jungle you're likely to be in danger. The natives up the north coast seem to be stirred up about something. They've been coming in through the mountain passes all night, and we heard gongs going in the hills till morning. This is the head season, you know—and a white man's head is worth a lot."

Filson said he would be careful, and he thought over the warning of Benson. The bay in which Black Pete had been driven ashore was to the north, some thirty miles from Tangeru overland.

Gedge did not return the next day. Filson supposed that the captain had spent the night aboard the *Seeker*, and, not finding him aboard the schooner, presumed Gedge had been delayed at the plantation. Filson slept aboard the *Peerless* the second night, and, being told that the barkentine would sail that day, went ashore to ask where Gedge was.

"He's most likely having a rest at the plantation-house," said Benson. "That's all right—we'll hold the barkentine till he shows up. It's orders."

"I'm a little worried," said Filson. "I think I'll go out and get our bosun and walk down to the plantation—if you think it's safe for us."

"Oh, you'll be safe enough in that direction," said Benson. "The jungle boys don't run around the beach between here and the plantation-house—they know better."

Filson didn't go back aboard the barkentine for the bosun. Instead, he hurried down the beach in the flaming heat of late morning. He was wearing a revolver, and as the lip of the jungle was more than thirty yards from the water, he felt that he could protect himself. And as Benson had said, there were no natives in sight along the beach that morning, either in the jungle or in the water.

When he had rounded the bend of the beach which shut off sight of the warehouses Filson heard voices in the brush to his right—and native voices. He didn't like that, after what Benson had said about the natives not daring to haunt the road to the plantation-house.

He hurried on, feeling that there was something about the frequent calls from the hills which was threatening. He wished that he had brought the bosun along.

Presently he came to a place where the sand was marked outside the road-like path along the shingle. He thought it looked as if a proa had been dragged into the jungle. Yet there were no marks of the proa having landed. And there were many tracks of bare feet on the moist, hard sand down close to the water.

"Mr. Filson!"

The mate stopped dead in his tracks; and though he was hot and perspiring, he felt a sudden chill. For the voice which had called to him from the jungle was the voice of Black Pete!

"Who's that?" called Filson, doubting his ears, and then without waiting for an answer, started to run—as a Malay with a blow-gun topped by a spear-head stepped out of the jungle.

"Don't run, sir!" called Black Pete's voice.

Filson stopped and turned to look at the Malay warrior—and recognized him as the former cook of the schooner *Seeker!*

"Where the —— did you come from, Pete?" gasped the mate.

"Over the hills," said Pete, grinning at Filson's astonished stare at the blow-gun, the head turbaned with a few strips of scarlet cloth, and the vari-colored *sarong* tucked about the cook's waist and falling in a skirt half-way to his knees. The hilt of a kris stuck up out of the folds, and over Pete's shoulder there was a cord from which hung the bamboo case for the poison darts of the blow-gun. There was no doubt now in the mate's mind about the Malay's being Black Pete—yet this was not the cook of the Battleship Lunch in San Francisco, nor the unobtrusive and docile galley-man of the schooner *Seeker*. Half-naked and armed with primitive weapons, Pete was transformed into a savage, sure of himself, and standing erect with head thrown back as if he feared no man and bent the neck to no master. With the jungle behind him he was a man among men—bold and fearless in his own savage environment.

"I thought the natives would kill you—and here you are dressed like a Malay——"

"I am a Malay," said Black Pete. "I am the son of a Panglima, and belong to a ruling family of this island. I was stolen and taken on a ship when I was a boy—twenty-three years ago. That's why I wanted to come back to Tangeru with the schooner."

"Good Lord!" gasped Filson. "Then you must have been talking to the natives last night aboard the schooner—talking on the dishpan!"

"Yes—my name is Barulla, and I shall be a *datu*," said Pete. "I tell my people last night who I am—yes, on the dishpan."

"Well, I'm glad you came out all right," said Filson. "If I was you I'd keep out of sight along here, or you'll run into Captain Gedge."

"I was looking for Cap'en Gedge myself," said Pete. "I came through the mountains last night, and I've been waiting for him. He didn't pay me."

"I know that," said Filson. "But you keep clear of Gedge. He'd like nothing better than a chance to take a shot at you, if he knew you'd beaten him out and was still alive. And if he saw you in that rig he'd have an excuse—say he thought you were a hostile native and shot you before he recognized you."

"Yes, I know," said Pete. "Perhaps you'll come up in the shade and talk with me. Oh, do not fear," he added hastily with a smile when he saw Filson was doubtful about going close to the jungle. "You have been a good friend to me, Mr. Filson—you and all the crew are safe from me and my people."

Filson turned and followed Pete to the lip of the jungle, curious to know what more the cook had to say. Pete pushed aside the heavy pendant leaves of the brush and slipped into a small glade—a cleared space which was much trampled. It was evidently a secret watching-place for the natives. Filson went in, but he was not anxious to remain there long.

"I'd better not stop here," said the mate. "I might miss the captain when he's on his way back to the jetty from the plantation."

"You can't miss him," said Pete, and he spoke a few swift words in Malay into the encompassing shrubbery.

Filson heard a cautious rustling, and was aware that there were other natives close at hand, though he could not see them.

"Don't worry," said Pete, smiling at the mate's nervousness. "Remember, I am at home here. Cap'en Gedge said I belonged to the jungle. He spoke true words—more true than he knew. After twenty-three years of the white man's civilization I yet do not understand some of the things of the white man, so I have come back to my people. Look at my back."

Pete swung round, and showed his naked back to Filson. Across the body of the former cook there was a network of cut and bruised flesh—great diagonal welts in the skin, swelled out like veins ready to burst. And many were open, though they had been treated with some native salve.

"That is what I have from Gedge," went

on Pete. "Now I have something to give you," and from the folds of his *sarong* he brought forth a packet and handed it to the mate. "This is the money for the crew—and your pay, Mr. Filson. From it I have taken the money due me—and the money due to Cap'en Gedge."

"Then you've seen Gedge!" exclaimed Filson. "He must have gone past here," as he looked at the packet which he held in his hand. "I—I've missed him."

"No, you will see him," said Pete, and stepped to the edge of the cleared place, where he pulled out a crude basket of rattan.

He lifted this basket in front of Filson and thrust aside some of the nipa matting which was inside the strands of rattan.

"Look here," said Pete, and he flipped aside the covering as the mate leaned forward to peer into the basket.

Filson saw something white—white hair it was.

"What the ——?" gasped the mate.

Pete reached into the basket and grasped the white hair, and lifted it out—a human head!

"He gets old quick in this country," said Pete; then as a savage grin broke over his dark face, he turned the head.

Filson gave a choking cry of horror.

"Oh, God!" he breathed, his low exclamation like an anguished appeal.

It was Gedge!

"The cap'en," said Pete quietly, "he belong in the jungle too. The white man's civilization, it was too good for him."

The Crocodile's Bride

by Santie Sabalala

Author of "In Kaffir Kraals."

THE crocodile in its own *ziziba* (habitation) is a tremendous amphibious reptile, as it grows to be more than twenty feet long. It is covered with barnacles from its head to the long rudder-like tail, looking not unlike the bottom of a ship that has been on the seas for many years without a scraping, and smelling just about the same.

An egg is laid no larger than a goose egg, in the sands, by the mother crocodile. A hole is dug with the front paws, and the egg pushed in and buried, and left there for about ten months, when the mother comes back and scratches away the sand, leaving the egg exposed, and goes away.

The young crocodile breaks through the shell late in the morning, no larger than a frog, a bit longer because of the tail, about six inches long altogether. From this it sometimes grows to the wonderful length that has been given, providing it lives over the first few months.

When it is young and helpless, everything under the sun in jungle life wants to kill it. The hawk and vulture, the lion, the *ingwe* (leopard) and the bok all seek its life.

There is only one thing that does not seek to kill it. That is a little bird, the friend of the *hlwepu* (crocodile), and its "toothpick" when it grows up.

The kraal of the *induna* (chief) Gazi la

"The Crocodile's Bride," copyright, 1922, by Santie Sabalala.

se Foti (Blood of the Waters) was in the midst of the clan of *hlwepu* worshipers in Mashonaland on the Limpopo River. The *induna* was also *iqira* (witch-doctor).

In a large hut, better kept than any of the others, some *beshe* (girls) were sitting around playing *tana toz.* Two *amadoda* (men) came out of a hut and walked toward the *sango.* Three *nkwenkwes* (boys) followed them as they wended their way toward the Mlimpo (Limpopo) River.

Both men were squat with strong-looking shoulders, flat chins and wide, square jaws which showed that they were of Mashona or Manica blood.

One man gestured all the while as they followed the path to the river. The pathway twisted tortuously this way and that way below the high elephant-grass.

The two *amadoda* stopped suddenly, and then turned around and ran back along the pathway. They collided with three boys who were following them. The men picked themselves up in a fury and informed the boys in shaken accents that *ingwe* was coming behind them. Men and boys used their elbows very generously in the mad scramble to get away from the invisible *ingwe.*

There was the sound of many feet plodding swiftly when the man in front stopped suddenly, yelling:

“*Ingonyama! Ingonyama!*” (“A lion! A lion!”)

The whole crowd piled upon him and knocked him down in their mad pace, scrambling up and untangling themselves as fast as they could. They stood up and saw the *ingonyama* with three others barring the way and eying them in wild wonder.

The boys cried: “*Walla! Walla! Walla! Bawo,*” shaking their right hands, with their left in their mouths, tears streaming down their bronze cheeks.

The two men kept on repeating: “*So lo u nyana!*” (“Son of dogs! Son of dogs!”) in terrified hysteria. When they had said this a few times in unison, one of them looked at the back trail that they had so swiftly been running along, and with the shout of “*Ingwe!*” dived into the long grass, followed by his friend.

The boys were bewildered and too much scared to move. They kept up a continual whimpering. It was not until the *ingwe* came up closely, sniffing at one of their number, that the boy yelled and almost shrieked: “*Suka! Suka!*” (“Get away! Get away!”) “*Gragra! Gragra!*” *

The *ingwe* stopped, bared its teeth and with a spitting snort dived into the long grass and was gone. The boys looked at one another and swallowed the swallows of nothing, smiling nervously through their tear-stained faces.

They timidly raised their voices, and then with one accord the trio shrieked at the top of their lungs:

“*Suka! Gra! Suka! Suka! Suka!*”

The four *ingonyama* reared up at the din made by the three, then sheepishly bumped each other’s noses as they meekly turned round and slunk away along the path.

The boys dug their fists in their eyes, wiped their noses with Adam’s handkerchief, and swaggered around with chests puffed up, each saying—

“*Za gijima meena kayle.*” (“They ran away when I shouted.”)

They began to argue as to who had really shouted the loudest. Each one claimed he had. The end of the argument was a free-for-all fight which ended when the boy Mkafula scrambled up and ran away, pelted with stones by his two companions.

As to the behavior of the lions and the *ingwe* for not eating up the boys, it might be explained that a lion ordinarily will not attack a human being unless hungry. In this case it is to be presumed that the band of *ingonyama* had had their meal—that also may be applied to the *ingwe.*

For if they, either the *ingonyama* or the *ingwe* had been hungry, what took place later would never have been written down here.

Mkafula ran in and out of the twisting pathway back toward the kraal, his companions shouting taunts at him in great delight. By hard running he was able to outdistance them, and floundered into the kraal *sango,* where the two *amadoda* were telling the others how they had bravely fought a band of lions, leopards and other savage beasts.

The double harangue came to a sudden end with the appearance of the badly blown boy. The parents of the other two boys crowded around him and questioned him about them. The boy informed them in hurt tones that he had saved them from being eaten by the *ingonyama,* and had been set upon and beaten by them for his bravery.

---

*A term of revulsion.

The consequence was that when the other two came into the *sango* they were very much surprized when their elders set upon them and beat them soundly. It was not until sundown, when they were eating their evening meal, that the two knew exactly why they had been beaten, for Mkafula wagged his head at them and told them they had better leave him alone next time he chased lions away for them.

Hard looks were cast his way. But their aching limbs forbade them from laying hands on him. A desultory game of *tana toz* was begun after the meal was over, but all of them soon tired of it, and got their *bayis* and mats and soon were all asleep.

EARLY next morning, about an hour or so before sunrise, the *nkwenkwes* woke up one by one. There was a lot of whispering going on. It rose and fell as an argument came up. There was a sudden hush as a voice whispered fiercely—

"*Lungle, mena fekela.*" ("All right, I will get it.")

There was the noise of some one getting to his feet, of stumblings and muttered protests in the dark. Fierce threats of bodily injury as the early riser passed in amongst his fellows. A form loomed in the low opening of the door for an instant, and was gone.

Fierce and hurried whisperings went on in the darkened hut—

"*Mena piri.*" ("I am first.")

"*Hini?*" ("How?")

"*Mena shaya wena fana.*" ("I will beat you, young warrior.")

"*Ewe, Mashona.*" ("Yes, Mashona.") This last derisively.

The form darkened the doorway again. There were excited scramblings in the dark hut; a fierce whisper for *ibiza* * brought a suppressed laughter and giggles all round. There was the *blub-blub-blub* sound of liquid being poured out. Pleading whispers of "*Futi futi*" ("More again, more again.")

A firm young voice said—

"*Hiyi.*" ("No.")

Sounds of noisy drinking and a smacking of lips.

"*Naga! Naga!*" ("Very nice! Very nice!")

"*Ewe, Mashona,*" ("Yes, Mashona,") they all chorused, for they were drinking *amasi* (sour milk or curds) which one of them had secreted till this hour.

This *amasi* is very strengthening and sustaining, and is palatable when one gets over the first aversion. The *nkwenkwes* love it as well as their elders, and thrive on it. It is an acquired taste, however.

The secret liquid feast was over. That was evident by the drumming of hands on tight-drawn stomachs. Happily they raised their voices in song:

"*Mena shile mena pile.*
Ewe, Mashona.
Mena shile mena pile.
Ewe, Mashona.

("I have eaten, I am healthy.
Yes, Mashona.
I have eaten, I am healthy.
Yes, Mashona.")

At the last line they pounded their heels hard on the floor of the hut in great enthusiasm. An angry voice in the doorway roared—

"*Mena shaya; wena to la.*" ("I will thrash you all; shut up.") The song ceased.

The blue-gray dawn stole into the small door. Loud and prodigious yawns were heard. There were sounds of fingers that crackled as they were "shocked." The boys trooped out of the hut on their various duties—some to milk and others to rake and make up fires in the different huts.

The glorious sun topped over the hills, and the wind blew away the soft mist. The few cattle in the *si bayi* were let out. Daring *nkwenkwes* got on the back of goats and rode them out of the *sango.*

The kraal came to life in a very lackadaisical way. Several *amadoda* came out of one hut, and, walking on their heels to save their feet from the cold ground, went into another hut to smoke an early pipe and sleep till noontide.

A fat old *umfazi* (woman) waddled out of a hut and went over to the well-kept one containing the girls, with a dishful of something to eat. Mkafula and another boy sauntered past it, glanced into the doorway, but saw nothing as the light was not yet strong enough.

The other boy led the way toward the river, following a different path from the one of the day before. They arrived at the river-bank by a natural bay. Mkafula would have walked into water in the bay.

---

* Pot or vessel in Kaffir. Horse in Mashona.

His companion snatched him back violently; and none too soon, for there was a terrific *snap!* as a huge snout shot out.

Mkafula scrambled frantically up the bank, his companion before him doing the same thing. They gained the top and looked around hastily to see the gnarled snout just thrusting itself over the edge of the bank.

In sheer fright they ran blindly into the jungle, scaring broods of wild guinea fowl and wild chickens. The awakening parrakeets and *si qenenes* (parrots) screeched at them. The monkeys chattered and swung from limb to limb as the two boys crashed headlong into the undergrowth in their blind flight from the crocodile.

Be it known that a crocodile is not the slow-moving reptile that is often to be seen in the zoological gardens of civilization, but is a quick-moving reptile in its native habitation; and when full grown, everything in jungle life flees away from it in sheer terror.

The two boys burst upon an open glade, and stopped to take a breath. With heaving chests they looked at each other and smiled. The face of the boy Mkene, Mkafula's companion, became serious. He told Mkafula something that made Mkafula open his usually large eyes still wider.

Did not Mkafula know that that was the *nacosikele hlwempu* (sacred crocodile) who was to be fed one of the *nacosikele beshe* (sacred girls)?

"*Kuluna wena juluma?*" ("Speak, why don't you speak?") demanded Mkene of Mkafula, who stood stupidly looking at him.

They looked at one another for a long second, and then looked up and around for different wild fruits, of which there was an abundance. Having filled themselves with *ingwenye, maqwede, qunube* and *ispingo* (various fruits), they cautiously turned over twigs, grass and stones to ascertain if any snakes were about. Satisfied, they lay down to doze in the cool shade before the sun got too hot.

Late in the morning they woke up to the sound of throbbing drum, drumming the summons in the simple native code. Here is a diagram of the rhythm, the "o" characters indicating the short beats and the dashes indicating the long ones. The beats are given in pairs with a pause between each pair. Each beat represents a syllable:

Gazi la se fo ti	oo	oo	—	—	
Gazi la se fo ti	oo	oo	—	—	
Gazi-gazi-gazi-gazi-gazi	oo	oo	oo	oo	oo
(pause)					
Gazi la se fo ti	oo	oo	—	—	
Gazi la se fo ti	oo	oo	—	—	
Gazi-gazi-gazi-gazi	oo	oo	oo	oo	

It had been merely a hand drum that had sounded first. Then the mighty throb of a war drum thundered out, hushing the screech of the parrakeets and chattering monkeys for an instant. In a few moments several other drums in distant kraals thudded out in response, until the whole atmosphere seemed to throb with the sacrifice call of

Gazi la se fo ti
Gazi la se fo ti
Gazi-gazi-gazi-gazi

(Blood of the waters,
Blood of the waters,
Blood—blood—blood—blood.)

Mkene and Mkafula got up and went swiftly toward the kraal. From all points of the compass people were swarming toward the river and not to the kraal. Each band had several hand drums which they beat to the code of the call.

NAKED small boys strutted beside their elders with heads up and chests pouted. They beat in tune and rhythm with the drums on their chubby, fat, round stomachs. Every one was in good humor. As each band arrived at the natural bay where the two boys had been nearly eaten by the crocodile, the drummers were marched to one side where they beat their drums.

The noise was like a thunder-storm at close quarters. Half a dozen war drums were brought up and lined in a circle along the bank, but were not beaten, for Gazi la se Foti, the *induna* witch-doctor of the kraal, came up just then.

He was hideous to behold. His whole body from head to feet was smeared with *umsizi* (soot) scraped off the bottom of the cooking-vessels. White rings surrounded his eyes, and white marks like ribs ran down his chest. On his head a pair of large oxhorns rested. Children shrank away from him; some even whimpered.

A dusty cloud was in the air. This was because ash-dust was being thrown down at the mass of struggling *hlwepus* (crocodiles) in order to make them *timla* (sneeze) and so keep them from coming up the bank. A crowd of *abafan* (boys) were energetically trying to keep them from climbing the bank. One missed his footing; there was a scrunching snap, and the *umfan* had lost a leg. The smell of blood started a stampede among the crocodiles.

The assembled natives in front retired from the edge of the bank. The boy whose leg had started the stampede was dragged hastily away by some of his companions, who spoke angrily at him for letting the *hlwepus* have a taste of his unsacred person.

Gazi la se Foti shouted to the assembled natives—

"Gijima kaya." ("Go back to the kraal.")

They trooped back slowly to the *kaya*, protesting strongly against the *umfan* person for letting one of the *hlwepus* bite his leg off.

Some of the *abafan* were left behind to see that the crocodiles did not follow the crowd and eat up any of the worshipers. They had their hands full and were kept busy for quite some time banging and prodding the reptiles back with thick, long poles. They made a lot of noise which brought more crocodiles.

It may be said by way of explanation that the crocodile is a very curious reptile. Any kind of a noise on the banks of a river will always bring a whole shoal of them. That is why the native worshipers line up a lot of drums before the sacrifice—to call up their gods, the crocodiles. As to the crocodiles, they may have learned from past incidents that wherever any noise is to be heard on the river-bank something edible for them would be there.

An *umfan*, seeing that they were not making any headway in keeping the crocodiles down the bank, but that others were coming up to strengthen their numbers yelled—

"Gijima u shaye; gijima u shaye." ("Hit them and run; hit them and run.")

"Ewe, Mashona," ("Yes, Mashona,") the others shouted as they broke their poles over the *hlewpus*' snouts in great hilarity and ran away to the kraal.

The immense crowd of assembled natives—those who were able to crowd in the kraal—were watching the girls of the well-kept hut playing *tana toz* as they chanted:

"Zip! Tana toz.
Nqyemela ama pondo.
Ugahla wande wela
Awu! Awu! Awu!"

("Zip! Tana toz
Cut off his horns.
Gahla has fallen down.
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah.")

They swung into the chorus:

"Nali sele,
Emva kwe ndhlin ka bawo.
Li timi uku suka?
Li ti
Ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta—ta!"

("There behind the hut,
Behind my father's house is a big frog.
What will he do if we chase him away?
He will
Hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop—hop!")

When they came to the words "He will hop" they squatted down and illustrated just how the frog would hop, which was very comical to see. The onlookers laughed and clapped their hands in approval.

The girls were fine to look upon, with beautifully proportioned limbs. Their bronze complexion was smooth as velvet because of their use of red ocher and animal fat. Their ages were from eight to eleven or twelve years.

From among these *beshes* the one for the sacrifice would be taken. Sacrifices are made for different reasons and seasons. When the river overflows its banks in the rainy season, and it seems as if the whole countryside will be flooded, an elder girl will be sacrificed, so that "it" (the river) will "grow old" (go down) quicker.

When the rainy season is delayed, and a prolonged drought is the portion of the tribe, with burned-up crops—the few that are cultivated—and cattle dying of thirst and the river dried up with the exception of dirty, slimy pools that swarm with crocodiles, a young *beshe* is offered for sacrifice, so that the river might "grow up" quickly.

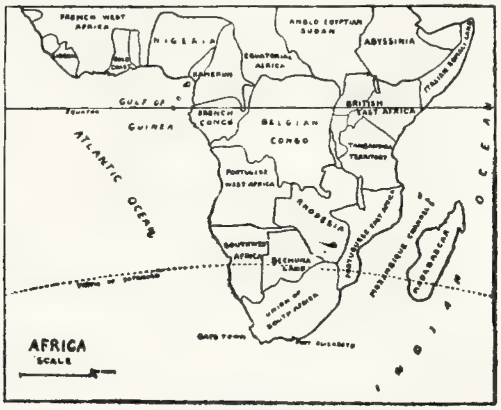
The sacrifice to be offered now was to be a young *beshe*, for the river was getting low. The *induna*, Gazi la se Foti, walked about in and out of the huts talking to some men here and nodding to groups of *abafan* there, and then vanished.

The girls played on with their games. One of the smaller girls was called into the well-kept hut and remained inside till the afternoon silence was shattered by the tremendous throbbing of six war drums.

These war drums stand about five or six feet from the ground, and are about seven or eight feet in circumference. Three men can beat on the surface with two drumsticks apiece and have plenty of elbow-room.

The drum is a piece of solid wood with the center cut and burned out. The covering is either sheepskin or human hide. The latter is much preferred for its wearing qualities. The drums are tuned to different kraals, and each one can be identified from what kraal it is sounding from when it is heard.

The tuning is done by having holes bored all around the drum just below the top edge, and wooden pegs driven in on raised knobs at intervals. The skin is folded over itself on the ends and holes pierced through at certain intervals, which fit into the knobs or pegs.



ON THE LIMPOPO RIVER, IN MASHONALAND, INDICATED ON THE MAP BY THE ASTERISK, TOOK PLACE THE INCIDENT OF THE CROCODILE'S BRIDE.

The requisite for a good drummer is good, strong, yet supple wrists. A good ear and a sense of time and rhythm, and to be a light sleeper; for it is never known when a drum from the *inkosi's* kraal or elsewhere might drum out a message of warning or summons.

The people got to their feet and swarmed toward the river and the drums. The fat old *umfazi* waddled along, leading by the hand a small *beshe,* who seemed half-dazed.

The fat *umfazi* and the *beshe* arrived at the river's bank by the natural bay. The noise from the six war drums was deafening. With a wave of his hand Gazi la se Foti motioned them to cease drumming, and it was done. In the appalling silence of a few seconds later the *induna* looked around him.

The crocodiles were struggling and swarming over each other, trying to reach the top of the bank. The water rippled as numbers of them swam swiftly yet silently forward to investigate the noise. An expectant hush filled the air. Gazi la se Foti whistled, and the swarming crocodiles turned round and slunk into the muddy, dirty water. Those that had been climbing the bank stopped and rolled down to the edge of the water. The assembled crowd of worshipers put their hands to their mouths and shook their heads at wonderful *mtagti* (witchcraft).

Gazi la se Foti had merely imitated the warning call that the little bird that is friendly to the *hlwepu* gives when any danger threatens the big reptile. The swarming, struggling mass of crocodiles of a few seconds past had thought that their feathered little friend had given them a warning of impending danger, when it was only the *induna* witch-doctor.

The last to take refuge in the muddy waters was a long, smelly moss-barnacle-covered, wicked-looking crocodile. Three feet away he looked like an old rotting log floating or lying along the river shore. This was the protective coloring that nature had given him, so that he was able to snap unsuspecting wild boks' heads off that had come down to drink or any other kind of jungle life that was so unfortunate as to be near that misleading deadwood when quenching their thirst.

The *induna* witch-doctor motioned for one stroke at one of the war drummers. *Boom!* The crocodile turned swiftly and powerfully, sending large waves to wash the shore. Its little eyes glittered brightly at the end of that horrible long snout.

Gazi la se Foti motioned to the *beshe* that the fat *umfazi* had brought along. The little girl came timidly toward him. He placed his right hand on her head, and began the ceremony speech in a grand voice of an orator:

"O wena mpefulo we metsi,
Mena nika wena le beshe.
Wena nika tina metsi.
Ibiza, inkoma yo ra pa in yafa
Metsi hayi kona ningi.
Wesa metsi manigi manigi."

"O great spirit of the water,
I give you this little girl.
You will give us water for her.
The horses and cattle are dying
For water we have not in abundance.
Make the rain grow big quickly."

At the end of the invocation the *induna* unslung a small calabash from around his neck, which was hung there by a sinew string, and shook out some of the contents on to the *beshe's* head. It was the dried blood of an ox.

This done, several *abafan* came up and tied the *beshe's* hands and feet, who was whimpering softly. The fat *umfazi* came up and scolded her, remarking that she should be proud to be made the *hlwepu smari* (crocodile's bride.)

One *umfan* got hold of her feet and another her head. They walked to the edge of the bank where at the bottom, half in and half out of the water, the reptile still waited. There was a second's silence, and then the two *abafan* swung their living burden once and let go. The body described a large arc, and was caught in the wide-open jaws of the waiting reptile. There was a sharp scream cut short as the *hlwepu* dived to the depths with his meal, leaving a trail of dark crimson on the waters.

The *induna* beat his chest and told the assembled people that the *mvula* (rain) would come, as it was "growing" even then. The *abafan* with hand drums beat them as hard as they dared and led the march toward the kraal, where there was to be drinking, dancing and singing 'way into the night.

AS THE sun's rays lengthened in the hot afternoon the form of a log rose slowly from the depths of the river. Long, smelly and moss-barnacle-covered it was as it slowly drifted toward the natural bay.

Arrived there, those tremendous jaws opened to show four rows of sharp, rusty, saw-like teeth. A little bird fluttered down and into those jaws. Both portions closed on it once; but when they were opened the bird was busy picking, picking the "rust" from those saw-like teeth.

THE COWMAN'S FIVE SENSES

by Allen Lee Haase

HAVE yuh ever heard the rawhide sing when a dogie hits the ground?
Have yuh ever heard the desert moan? Now that's an eery sound.
Have yuh ever heard a mountain lark, as he trills high up o'erhead?
If yuh hain't, yuh hain't heard nothin'; yo're not alive, yo're dead.

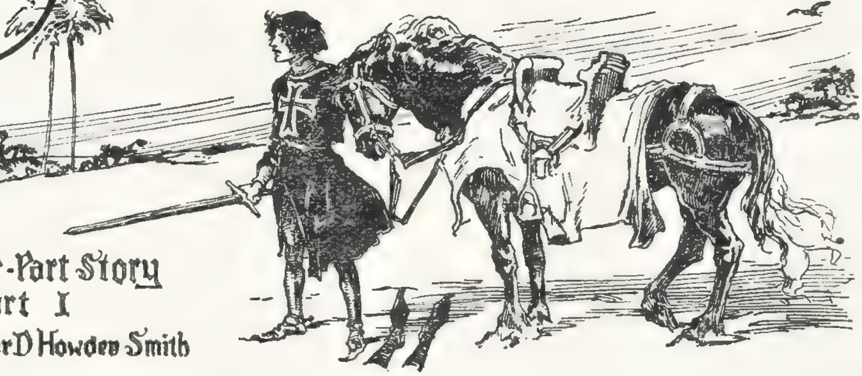
Have yuh ever smelled the camp-fire's tang when the pot begins to boil?
Have yuh ever smelled the tarpaulins with their taint o' honest toil?
Have yuh ever smelled the smoke and hair when a mav'rick starts to bawl?
If yuh hain't, yuh hain't smelled nothin'—don't believe yuh can smell at all.

Have yuh ever felt the give an' take of a buckskin twixt yer knees?
Have yuh ever felt the awesomeness of a ten-mile grove o' trees?
Have yuh ever felt the dizziness after hearing a rifle 'sping'?
If yuh hain't, yuh hain't felt nothin'—yuh must be a funny thing.

Did yuh ever taste the sweetness o' the air when the sky begins to pink?
Did yuh ever taste the alkali in that creek across the sink?
Did yuh ever taste the honey from the tree the bears have torn?
If yuh hain't, yuh hain't tried nothin'; where yuh been since yuh been born?

Have yuh ever seen the sun spring up when mornin's hushed an' still?
Have yuh ever seen the blood-red shine o' that Sangre Christo hill?
Have yuh ever seen the dust spurt up when a greaser's shots hurl by?
If yuh hain't, yuh hain't seen nothin'—yuh must be a *city* guy.

A Son of Strife



A Three-Part Story
Part I

by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "The Heels of Chance," "The Doom Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I

SIR GUI RIDES ADVENTURING

THE warders of Nerak sprang to their posts as the horn clanged brazenly in the velvet darkness across the moat.

"Who comes?" they shouted.

" 'Tis I, your lord," was the impatient answer. "Make haste, varlets! I thirst!"

Sir Antonio della Stravone, the seneschal, came running across the courtyard.

"Do you not know Sir Gui's voice?" he fussed. "Lower the drawbridge, fools! Hoist the portcullis!"

Winches clanked and pulleys whined as the ponderous mass of the draw descended slowly to span the open gap. The horn sounded again, with an abrupt note of command. Hoofs thudded on the wooden planking, rumbled in the archway of the gate below the bulk of Baldwin's Tower. A cavalcade emerged from the gloom of the entrance and trotted into the midst of the open space that stretched from the outer wall to the soaring pile of the Inner Ward.

"What luck, Messer Gui?" hailed the seneschal as the leader dismounted.

"Little enough," grumbled the lord of the castle. "A murrain on this sweltering, barren land! Even the pigeons take flight from it!"

"What would you?" returned the Italian with a shrug. "War, always war! The animals and birds are free. They will not bide it. 'Tis only we and the poor folk of the villages who must wrangle on with the Saracens."

" 'Tis otherwise in Byzantium," protested the tall huntsman. "There life is worth living. Here 'tis a weight upon your hands."

"Be of good cheer, lord," urged the seneschal. "Company awaits you in the great hall."

Sir Gui turned upon him with an air of relief.

"For that I thank the saints!" he exclaimed. "One night I am not condemned to you and Fray Gilberto—and my own sour thoughts! Who is it?"

"Messer Renier de Chappes."

"The adventurer whom the king hath made lord of Mardan?"

"Aye."

"And you call him company!" Sir Gui's laugh was loudly scornful. "An upstart foreigner, a jackal that hath obtained the fief a better man died to win and save! Better yourself, Antonio!"

The Italian chuckled with quiet amusement.

"The lord of Mardan is not alone," he said. "John the Englishman is with him."

"Ah, that is another story!" Sir Gui's voice rang with pleasure. "He hath ever a brave geste to sing and news to relate. I will join them."

He started to ascend the steps which led from the courtyard to the wide double doors that gave entrance to the great hall; but near the top he halted.

"Hath the lookout reported aught?"

"No, lord. Why? Did you see——"

"I rode toward Jordan," returned Sir Gui. "I saw naught save sand and rocks and half-starved peasants. Are all our company within gates?"

"All but Ali Ma'akwaa."

"The captain of the bowmen! And he?"

"Nay, lord, I can not say. You gave orders he was to ride forth at pleasure. He left before you did, and is not yet returned."

Sir Gui nodded slowly, and drew off his heavy hawking gauntlets.

" 'Tis a shrewd knave," he commented, "and knows the country well. 'Twas he tracked me the wolf I slew in Whitsuntide week. Give him free rein."

"Aye, lord. And what other commands?"

"None, unless it be that you join us at the board."

A Poulani serving-knave, one of the half-breeds of Syrian and Frankish ancestry, threw open the doors of the great hall before Sir Gui. Inside, the spacious chamber was blurred with shadows, but at the upper end a blaze of oil lamps and rushlights illumined the dais where two figures sat at a long table athwartwise of the room. Both raised their heads as Sir Gui entered.

"Ha, Gui de Taberie!" cried a slender man with clean-shaven cheeks. "Well met! I began to fear the Saracens had taken you."

"On my own lands? Nay, 'tis not so bad yet, John. I greet you well, Messer Renier," he added stiffly, turning to the second occupant of the high table, a man full as large as himself, with a ruddy, arrogant face. "We do not meet often, although our lands march together."

"You are always welcome at Mardan, Messer Gui," replied de Chappes—but there was no cordiality in the invitation.

"Aye, the king himself hath sent me to endeavor that there shall be cooperation betwixt you twain," spoke up John the Englishman. "Hearing that I was about setting forth upon a visit to the court of Antioch, he bade me tarry on my way and carry this message to the lords of Nerak and Mardan. For, says Amalric, you are the two wardens of the Eastern march upon whom falls the brunt of guarding the heart of the kingdom, and he would have you brethren in earnest as well as in purpose."

"Why, as to that there can be no question," returned Sir Gui coldly. " 'Tis in the interest of both of us to keep the Saracens out. When we fail—or perchance when one of us fails—then let the king read us at fault."

"No Saracen foray shall pass the gates of Mardan," declared de Chappes.

"Then will you perform greater deeds than the greatest lord of the land," sneered Sir Gui. "I and my forefathers have held Nerak since the Crosses came into Outremer, and none has called us delinquent—and lived—yet many a foray has passed these gates."

"Messer Renier spoke by the book," interrupted John the Englishman, anxious to keep the peace. "But in truth, Gui, there is more to the king's message."

Sir Gui yawned elaborately.

"Let be with statescraft, I pray you," he begged. "I have ridden since morning and am weary. Ho, varlets! Wine! None of your muddy Syrian brew, but a flask of the Cyprian."

"Drink, by all means," said John the Englishman, laughing. "But list to the king. He wots well the love you bear for him, and weighty is the trust he imposes in you, knowing, so he saith, that you place always the good of the land before that of your fief."

"The king deceives himself," protested Sir Gui, pouring the ruddy wine from a golden flagon a squire presented on bended knee. "I care naught for this dry, hard fief of mine. Had I other resort I would flee it tomorrow. But we barons of Outremer are reared to the one end. We have no gold to purchase richer manors at home. 'Tis this or nothing. And so I ride as pleases me, John, to hunt, to hawk, to war upon my enemies. But as for the villeins who farm my wretched fields, I care not whether they hunger or thirst, so be they deliver me my rents."

The lord of Mardan shook his head.

"You do not honor yourself by so speaking, Messer Gui," he said. "I do not say it with intent to offend, but——"

Sir Gui laughed, and withdrew his nose from the ebbing cup.

"Honor? What is honor?" quoth he. "An I read the signs aright, 'tis no other than power, win it as you may. I am shortly returned from a visit to Constantinople, where men who can do so live the easiest, pleasantest lives on earth. They think not of honor nor do they prate of it. Power they seek—and riches. And with these they are content. 'Tis a right fair life, my lord, and I ask no other."

John the Englishman sighed; de Chappes glowered.

"Still, Gui," persisted the Englishman, "the king hath entrusted me with a message, and with your good will, I will even deliver it."

"He is a good lord, and I should be loath to say him nay," proclaimed Sir Gui.

"There are many barons of the desert marches of the same mind," agreed John.

"To be sure. And why not? Where would be the kingdom without us?"

"Aye, you are all-important, and equally is it necessary that you all should stand together, burying disputes and feuds beneath the commands of the common good."

"And what may the king mean by that?" inquired Sir Gui softly.

He put down his cup and glanced from one of his companions to the other. John the Englishman was staring straight ahead, but Sir Gui surprized de Chappes in a stealthy glance of appraisal.

"Why, even this," said the Englishman at length. "Messer Renier here hath made frequent complaint that you do not share with him the raids upon the Saracen caravans that pass through the desert from Babylon to Damascus and the cities of Roum."

"Ah, so!" breathed Sir Gui, sitting upright in his chair.

"I believe the king hath sent word of this to you before," continued John.

"He hath."

"Well, he would have you know, Gui, that he takes it very much to heart. Messer Renier hath put himself to expense to strengthen his fief and his hold, and he tells the king he hath sore need of a share of the revenues from the raids which you keep to yourself."

" 'Tis so," affirmed de Chappes loudly.

"Aye," conceded Sir Gui. "And hath any one brought to the king's attention that I hold my fief under a grant from Godfrey the Protector, with free and unrestricted right of wardship, fees and perquisites over the caravan routes of the marches and beyond? My father and my father's father sat here before me, and none sought to challenge their rights until these seekers of fortune who now haunt the court at Jerusalem came overseas!"

"Do you asperse my honor?" demanded de Chappes, starting up from his seat.

Sir Gui waved him back.

"I would not fight you, my lord," he said calmly. "You are under my roof, and, in any case, fighting will not serve. I stand in this matter upon my feudal rights. Fifty spears and two hundred and fifty Turcoples I supply when the king proclaims the assize of arms. In return for that and a share of my town and passage dues, I have my villeins' labor and the raiding of Saracen caravans. You, nor any other man, can not take those rights from me Did the king, himself, assail me, I should appeal from him to the barons—and they would uphold me."

De Chappes scowled and made no answer. John the Englishman drew figures with his finger in the wine lees on the table.

"Of your rights, Gui, you may be sure the king hath no doubts," he observed after an interval of silence. "But all is not well with the land. 'Tis difficult to obtain reenforcements from overseas, and those lords who do rally to our assistance deserve fitting reward. So——"

"I would say naught to the despite of the lord of Mardan," exclaimed Sir Gui bruskly. "But when Godfrey de Bouillon allotted and partitioned the fiefs of the land, he was guided by justice. Mardan sits back in a vale of the hills, well-watered, rich of soil. Nerak is a rocky eagle's nest. I respect the king, and I seek to obey his wishes. But I can not guard his marches on the beggarly revenues of this fief. My one source of wealth is the spoil of the desert caravans. I can not hire men-at-arms with stones. Nay, what is mine is mine."

Again silence fastened upon the three. Presently, John the Englishman looked up.

"Is there aught more you would have me say, Messer Renier?" he asked.

De Chappes growled an impatient—

"No."

"It hath been an unpleasant errand, Gui," continued the Englishman. "I would have you dismiss my share in it from your mind."

"Right gladly will I," assented Sir Gui. "But——"

Horns brayed in the courtyard. Cymbals clashed. Voices were raised in shouts of command.

* * *

SIR GUI started to his feet, and unhooked the long, double-edged war-sword which hung from the back of his chair. His guests did likewise. Squires leaped from the shadows of the hall with helm and hauberk. The doors crashed open, and in clanked Sir Antonio, the seneschal, a slender, brown, hook-nosed man, in a peaked helmet and mail shirt, at his heels.

"What means the alarm, Antonio?" called Sir Gui.

"Ali hath just brought news of moment, lord. I raised the garrison, sure you would be wishful to act swiftly."

"Is there a Saracen foray?" questioned de Chappes, struggling into the meshes of his hauberk.

"Nay, lord. Fortune hath dropped a rich prize into our hands. Ali, the captain of my lord's Turcoples, was scouting the caravan-track and found that a host of merchants and travelers from Babylon were making camp by the Wells of Sanah.

"Two hundred camel-loads, besides asses and horses," affirmed the hook-nosed man, a gleam of exultation in his eyes.

De Chappes cast down his sword upon the table with a mighty clangor.

"This is an insult passing support!" he rasped. "Messer John, I will ride hence."

"What!" exclaimed Sir Gui innocently. "Will you not join us, lord?"

De Chappes glared impotently at him.

"Nay, lord, you shall have a fair share of the plunder," promised Sir Gui.

"Mark me, Gui de Taberie," croaked the lord of Mardan. "I may wait long, but my revenge I shall have."

"Revenge?" mouthed Sir Gui. "Why, what now, lord? I will meet you in the lists on any terms."

"'Tis not the revenge I seek," snapped de Chappes. "The only one I will accept must involve your ruin."

And he strode from the room, his squire at his heels.

"St. Remi aid me, but 'tis a sad temper the fool possesses!" remarked Sir Gui. "Howbeit, we have other thoughts to dwell upon. Ali Ma'akwaa, you are a man after my own heart. You shall have a knightly share of the spoils. Ha, John, what say you? Will you ride with me?"

The Englishman laughed.

"Gladly, Gui, although you have been unnecessarily rough with Renier de Chappes. Ah, friend, what good doth it serve to bring down upon yourself the hatred of all the newcomers?"

"I would rather have their hatred than their friendship," retorted Sir Gui. "Did I not offer him a chance to share in this raid simply because he was my guest?"

"You but made it worse."

"——! Whatever I said would have irked him, then! Look you, John, shall I let pass such an opportunity as comes to me now? The spoils of this caravan will settle my debts with the Genoese money-lenders of Tripoli, and leave the means to secure myself here. Art ready?"

"At your orders, Gui. And prithee, forget my errand. For after all, 'twas not mine, but the king's."

Sir Gui threw a mailed arm around the Englishman's shoulders.

"Say no more," he bade. "The king sent you because he knew you were the one man in the land to beard any baron in his own hold. Now, let us ride. We have wine within us, and a fair venture, and the night's protection from the sun. What more could men ask?"

They stood in the doorway, and surveyed the courtyard, bright with torches and crammed with men on horseback.

"Antonio," ordered Sir Gui, "you must guard Nerak. Fray Gilberto shall remain with you. Where is he?"

"Here, lord."

A man in a black cassock, with corded waist and hempen sandals, pushed between the horsemen. He was squat and powerful in build, a soldier at need, like all the priests of the marches.

"Father, you will second the seneschal. And now, Ali, what strength must we draw from the garrison?"

"A score of spears, lord," replied the Turcople without hesitation. "And—a hundred of my bowmen."

"So be it," agreed Sir Gui. "Forward, men! Christ and the Sepulcher!"

"Christ and the Sepulcher!" they thundered back, as they clattered behind him through the gateway under Baldwin's Tower.

CHAPTER II

SPOIL OF THE DESERT

THE hoofs of the horses made no sound in the yielding sand. Overhead the quarter-moon had waned, and the stars twinkled dimly, aloof from the world. A hot wind blew in fitful gusts from the south.

"God cursed this land when our Saviour was crucified," gasped John the Englishman as a handful of sand rattled against his mail.

"You are too serious, John," rejoined Sir Gui.

The captain of the Turcoples trotted to his master's side.

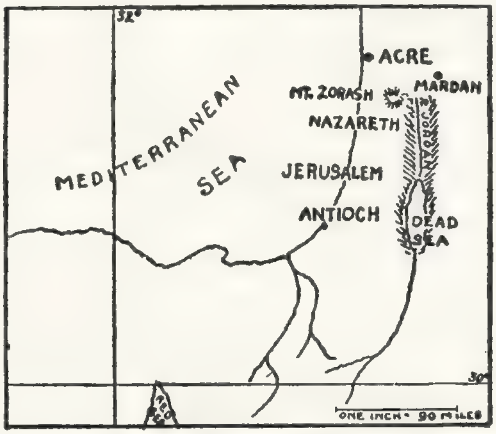
"Ha, Ali, what now?"

"The Wells of Sanah are beyond the next sand-hill, lord. You may see the tops of the grove."

Sir Gui followed the pointing finger toward the east where a faint pink streak along the horizon proclaimed the approach of dawn. Etched clear against the skyline was a wide clump of ragged tufts and fronds.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Ali, do you and your bowmen lead the way. The men-at-arms shall be at your heels."

The Turcoples broke into a run in response to a sibilant command from their captain; the men-at-arms put their heavy horses to a lumbering gallop. Still, there was no sound, except the panting of the men and the heaving of the horses. They passed the crest of the sand-hill, crossed the interval between its base and the outer trees of the grove and were then swallowed up in the foliage. The bowmen spread themselves in a single long, swaying line; the men-at-arms rode in fours, spears leveled, shields dressed.



PALESTINE AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF MATTEO. MODERN DETAILS, SUCH AS THE SUEZ CANAL, WHICH CONNECTS THE RED SEA WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN, ARE OF COURSE OMITTED.

No sentinel stood forth to oppose them, and they burst into the open space at the northern end of the grove where tents and shelters were clustered thick around the wells.

"Christ and the Sepulcher!" shouted Sir Gui, lance in rest.

The men-at-arms reechoed the cry. The Turcoples yelped like hungry wolves, and swarmed amongst the unlucky travelers, shooting and hewing with a ferocity which was not diminished by the fact that their victims were of their own race. The caravan guards, Mameluke mercenaries, gathered in groups and fought ineffectually. Whenever they were able to stand off the bowmen, Sir Gui and his men-at-arms tore them asunder. The merchants and traders were butchered as they slept or fled out into the desert. The slaves and servants lay supine, heedless of a change of masters.

Sir Gui rode hither and thither, supervising the work of securing the loot and directing the fighting. Yet it was John the Englishman who directed his attention to the great prize of the raid.

"Dost see the white tent yonder, Gui?" he cried as the lord of Nerak gloated over a bale of muslins the Genoese traders would redeem at its weight in bezants.

"Where?" replied Sir Gui, loath to tear his eyes from their feasting.

"On the brink of the farthest well—where the black men are fighting with the Turcoples."

Sir Gui looked up, his interest challenged.

"I had thought we were finished with these people," he answered. "By our Lady of Tortosa, let us make an end!"

John couched his lance reluctantly, for up to that time they had found none who would meet men in armor; but the black men—they were Nubian eunuchs of gigantic size—faced the charge unflinchingly, and wielded their simitars with deadly skill. Several of the men-at-arms were unhorsed and one was slain. But the armored column broke down the Nubians' defense, hurled them from their position in front of the tent and left them to be harried by the bowmen who hastened up as the din of combat increased.

Sir Gui halted at the entrance to the tent.

"I am joyous for your vigilance, John," he said, pointing to an Arab stallion, pawing at its picket-rope beside the canvas door. "Here is some traveler of importance, who was about to flee under cover of his servants' resistance. Doubt not we shall find a rich ransom within." He shifted fluently into Arabic which was a second mother-tongue to the border lords of that tortured kingdom. "Ho, within there, be you emir or merchant, yield yourself to Gui de Taberie, and no hurt shall be done to you!"

There was no answer, but the canvas wall fluttered violently.

"By the saints, the fellow is a foul coward!" swore Sir Gui. "My bridle, John. I will pull him out."

He dismounted and strode up to the tent door, sword in hand. But before he reached it an old Arab woman slipped forth and confronted him.

"Who are you?" he demanded in surprize.

"I am Moosha," she answered.

"So 'twas you— But no, the blacks would never have died for you!" protested Sir Gui. "Who is within?"

"You may slay Moosha," she said, folding her arms across her breast, "but she will tell you nothing."

Sir Gui summoned two men-at-arms, and they lifted the defiant figure aside.

"Now, we shall see," he called to John the Englishman. "Here is a savory mystery. Mayhap, some old dame——"

The curtain was wrenched aside.

"Moosha! Moosha! Moosha! Where are they taking you? Do not leave me!"

The liquid Arabic polysyllables flowed in tinkling music from the full, curved lips there was no veil to hide. The bright, limpid, brown eyes, the dimpled cheeks, the thick black hair, the gently curving chin, were all revealed. The clinging robes of samite exposed the gracious, swelling lines of her figure. In the abandonment of her distress, she saw nothing, thought of nothing, but her old nurse. Her arms were outstretched in a mute gesture of pleading.

"St. Cornelius be my helper!" apostrophized Sir Gui. "John, saw you ever the like?"

But the Englishman was speechless before this unexpected vision of loveliness.

"I spoke, as I remember, of a ransom," quoth Sir Gui, as much to himself as to his companion; "but I think we shall have difficulty in surrendering so rare a jewel. Lady," he addressed her direct, "how are you called?"

She glanced up eagerly at the sound of the Arabic, but shrank instinctively from his strange armor and the naked sword in his hand.

"I am Horazahde," she said in a voice scarce above a whisper.

"A lovely name," he commented; "but how else may we identify you?"

"My father is the prince of Emesa," she answered proudly.

"And what is his name, lady?"

"Achmet-ibn-Muros."

"Of the House of Shahdi! 'Tis a prize of prizes!"

"But you will let me go!" she begged. "There is peace between your people and mine!"

"Peace—aye, of a sort. But there is never peace betwixt men and women."

She regarded him for the first time with a trace of personal interest, and the dimples in her face were accentuated. He was a man of fine appearance, his Norman darkness in no way akin to her own olive tint.

"And how came you in the desert, lady?" he continued.

"I was returning from a visit to the court of the sultan of Babylon, lord," she said simply.

"And now you shall visit my castle of Nerak."

"But my father? And the Emir El-Afdel!"

"We will not worry about them. But who is the Emir El-Afdel?"

"I am returning to Emesa to marry him," she answered, meeting Sir Gui's glance squarely.

"At your own desire?" he questioned, leaning toward her.

"My people do not ask a maiden's desire, lord."

Sir Gui laughed with a kind of gay mockery. His veins felt as though they were flooded with heady wine.

"Then I see no reason why we should concern ourselves with El-Afdel!" he cried. "Ho, men, put down the good Moosha—gently! Gather up this tent and all its trappings, collect the best of the slaves and fetch them to Nerak."

"And the princess?" questioned John the Englishman.

"She shall ride with us, if she will. How say you, lady?"

Sir Gui motioned to the little Arab stallion. The Princess Horazahde's eyes lighted with pleasure.

"I love above all things to ride," she exclaimed.

"And you will not attempt to flee from us?" pressed Sir Gui.

"Would you permit it, lord?" she asked, with lowered eyes.

"No, by the splendor of ——!" swore Sir Gui. "John, do you take her bridle on that side, and I will ride on this."

"What would you do with her, Gui?" asked the Englishman in French.

"What would you?" countered the lord of Nerak, without shifting his gaze from the dainty figure astride the Arab.

"Only the —— knows," muttered John the Englishman to himself.

Behind them the spoils of the caravan were extended in a tenuous line across the desert, guarded in flank and rear by Ali Ma'akwaa's alert bowmen. In the east, at their backs, the sun rose in a flaming ball of fire, blood-red, aye, red as the pools the hungry sand was drinking by the scattered corpses that ringed the Wells of Sanah.

IT WAS high noon when the cavalcade straggled into the castle.

"Ha, Antonio," cried Sir Gui as the seneschal ran out upon the drawbridge to meet them, "we have had the luck of foreign adventurers this day. Do you escort our fairest prize to the bower that was my lady mother's in Gui's Tower."

Sir Antonio goggled stupidly, caught a grim twinkle in the eye of John the Englishman and made shift to murmur—

"It shall be done, lord."

He would have assisted Horazahde to dismount, but Sir Gui was before him, and her lithe body slid gracefully from the saddle into her captor's arms. He held her so for the bare fraction of a minute. Then, flushing, stepped back as she disengaged herself.

"Rest well, lady," he said.

She turned her face away, and followed slowly after the seneschal.

"Come, man," adjured John the Englishman, impatiently. "Have done with staring at her, and let us rid ourselves of mail and taste meat and wine. You are like to see enough of her or I miss my guess."

Sir Gui made him no answer, but later, when they all sat at noon-meat at the high table, the lord of Nerak turned upon Sir Antonio.

"What think you of our prize?" he questioned.

"The goods or the lady?" returned the seneschal slyly.

"Nay, the lady."

The seneschal waxed thoughtful.

"She is very fair," he opined; "but——"

He hesitated.

"But what?" prompted Sir Gui.

"What will you do with her?" spoke up Fray Gilberto from the end of the table.

"Aye," agreed Sir Antonio, "what will you do with her, lord?"

And now Sir Gui hesitated.

"I asked the same question of John," he replied. "He answered——"

"Forget my answer," interrupted the Englishman. "There is but one thing to do with her, Gui."

"And that?"

"Even dispatch a herald to Emesa and mulct her father as best you may."

"Aye, that is good advice," agreed Sir Antonio; "and meanwhile, lord, you had best let me carry her to Jerusalem and place her in care of the ladies of the court."

Sir Gui took a deep draft of wine.

"You are both wrong," he decided with a glint of mischief in his eye.

"Wrong?" repeated John the Englishman. "How so? She is a maiden gently reared. Her family will pay heavily for her."

"So that she might marry a man she does not love," amended Sir Gui contemplatively.

"How know you that?" demanded the seneschal.

"Because she was pleased to acquaint me so. And 'tis my purpose, friends, to save her from such a fate."

The seneschal and Fray Gilberto stared at him in amazement, but John the Englishman continued eating as though nothing had been said.

"She is the spoil of my raid," pursued Sir Gui, "spoil I won from the desert. She is mine. To say sooth, John might dispute my claim, for he first drew my attention to her, but if he does I will buy him off at any price."

"Would you wed the lady, lord?" inquired Fray Gilberto.

"How could I, reverend father, when she is a pagan?"

"She could be baptized."

"What boots it?"

"Nay," said John the Englishman, "she is a princess, though she is a paynim."

"At the least," urged Fray Gilberto, "you should marry her, lord."

Sir Gui shook his head.

"I have no itch for bonds of Holy Church."

"One day you may be required to wed," declared the Englishman. "When that day comes, what will be the lot of the Lady Horazahde?"

"Nay, John, you wrong me," replied Sir Gui, smiling. "I have no feeling for our dried-up, brittle Frankish ladies. I seek the fire and passion of the desert people. I think I may find it in Horazahde."

"You will find it—and you will also find your death. She is no ordinary wench of the Bedouin tribes. Her lineage counts for much. She——"

"Would you force her against her will?" the priest burst forth.

"You, too, misjudge me, father," protested Sir Gui, still smiling. "The lady shall have complete liberty of choice—within these walls."

"And you believe that she will accept——"

"I *know* that she will accept."

"And he is right," proclaimed John the Englishman. "She is young. She is of the desert, albeit gently bred. She is a paynim reared in the paynim way. Already she yields to the lure."

"Art my friend, after all, John," exclaimed Sir Gui, reaching his hand across the table. "I had thought you meant to play the spoil-sport."

"What you do is wrong, Gui," returned the Englishman with energy. "If there is a God such as Fray Gilberto believes in, you will be punished for it—and mayhap, others who will not be equally guilty. But I do not seek to blame you, for I know that you and she are the victims of the land that nourished you. Go to, Gui. You may be happy for a space. Afterward, you shall pay for it—and those who come after you."

Sir Gui made a wry face.

"You remind me of Fray Gilberto at sermon-time when his last night's meat sets heavy on his stomach," he replied. "As for payment—some day, belike, I shall die in a stricken field or in defense of the king. I ask no better, nor would I end otherwise."

"Take care it be not in your own castle, lord," said the seneschal.

"Your blood must be turning to water, Antonio," jibed Sir Gui. "No foe hath ever forced Nerak."

"Because he knew not how," rejoined John the Englishman. "Watch out, Gui. You shall win powerful enemies by this deed. And a surprize escalade at night might well carry the Squire's Curtain."

"So! 'Tis an engineer as well as jongleur! Marry, I have always underrated you, John. What you say is true, and it shall be looked to what time I have the funds for masons. That curtain must be reenforced, and there should be an inner wall."

"Best not wait too long," advised the Englishman, rising.

"What? Must you go?"

"Aye, 'tis a tedious journey to the sea, and thence to Antioch. God send you be in life when next I ride to Nerak."

"Nay, be not so glum. A fair voyage to you."

John passed from the hall, and the seneschal with him to see him off.

"Fray Gilberto!" called Sir Gui.

"Aye, lord?"

"Prithee, bid a squire lead the Lady Horazahde to the garden beneath the Tower of Winds."

CHAPTER III

HOW MATTEO WAS BORN

THE garden under the Tower of Winds was perched on the edge of the steep cliff which was the most formidable of the rear defenses of Nerak. A low stone-wall guarded the brink, and olive trees and cypresses thrived in the shallow soil.

Sir Gui stepped from the postern at the tower's foot and paced slowly across the turf to the verge. A glance assured him the squire had not yet fulfilled his mission, and leaning one elbow on the coping of the wall, he stared out across the tangled hills and valleys of his fief, blinking his eyes in the severe sunlight that bathed the distant summit of Mount Zorash.

"You sent for me, lord."

He turned—and Horazahde stood before him, startled, alert, with a rosy glow in her cheeks, and eyes that looked and fluttered and looked away.

"Yes, I sent for you," he answered.

He walked toward her.

"Are you comfortable?"

"I have a spacious chamber, lord."

"I wish you to be happy at Nerak," he said.

She did not look at him or answer.

"Are you unhappy?" he pressed.

"I have not been here long enough to know," she murmured.

"You have only to ask for what you wish," he urged.

"Then I may go?" she asked, but there was no insistence in her voice.

"Go?" he echoed. "Why would you go, lady? Where would you go? Are you not safe here? Is there anything you desire which you may not have?"

He waited long for a reply.

"I—do—not—know," she said at last.

"Are you lonely?" he suggested.

Again she did not answer. He drew closer to her.

"Horazahde!"

She did not retire before him; she did not look at him. She stood motionless, her veil cast aside, her shimmering robes sweeping the dusty grass, her eyes fastened, as his had been a moment since, upon the craggy, sun-bathed rocks of Mount Zorash.

"I do not know men," she remarked of a sudden.

"I am glad that you do not. Stay here and let me teach you."

For the first time her eyes met his, humid, lustrous, tinted by hidden fires.

"Stay with you—always?"

"Always, Horazahde!"

"You will keep me? You will not let me go—not even if my people send for me? You will not tire of me and cast me off?"

"Never—by the splendor of ——!"

The sunlight glinted on his crisply curling black hair. One clinched fist was lifted above his head. All that was strong, all that was noble, all that was great in him shone forth in his beaked Norman face.

And her eyes kindled with new depths of passion, her figure drooped forward. He caught her in his arms, and her body clung pliantly to his. Her lips were willing. The restless surge of life snatched them up in its embrace and bore them swiftly, faster and ever faster, out upon uncharted seas.

"Mortal sin!" muttered Fray Gilberto as they passed him, oblivious in their rapture.

"Mad youth!" grunted Sir Antonio, watching them climb the stairs to Horazahade's bower.

But their love was very real, and if it did no more, it lifted Sir Gui from the brutish level of a march baron, who gave no thought to any concern beyond food, drink and fighting. They lived together, as it were, in a world apart, riding and hawking, pacing the garden under the Tower of Winds, telling each other tales of the years before they had met. So the days sped, and became weeks until three months had passed. Then, one morning the warders on Baldwin's Tower blew their horns to call the garrison to arms, as a long column of Saracens debouched from the desert track and drew rein a far bow-shot beyond the moat.

One of the invaders spurred forward to a point opposite the gate.

"In the name of Allah, peace!" he cried. "I would speak with the Frank lord, Messer Gui de Taberie."

Sir Gui climbed upon the battlements of Baldwin's Tower.

"I am Gui de Taberie," he answered. "What do you wish with me?"

"I am the herald of Achmet-ibn-Muros, prince of Emesa. He demands that you render unto him, safe and undefiled, his daughter, the Princess Horazahde."

Sir Gui laughed aloud.

"I could not deliver the Lady Horazahde up to you, if I would."

"We know that she is with you," returned the Saracen sternly.

"Aye, she is here, but she would not leave me, if I gave her permission to go with you."

His words carried clear to the main body of the Saracens, and they raised a hoarse shout of rage.

"Have you ravished her?" demanded the herald.

"What I have done, I have had her consent in doing," rejoined Sir Gui. "Be content with that."

"Nay, hear me further, Christian dog," shouted the herald. "My master, the prince of Emesa, bids me say to you that by this token he declares relentless war upon you."

And the Saracen hurled his javelin against the walls.

"He will wage war upon you without ceasing, by day and by night, upon you and all your company, upon the stranger who tarries within your gates, upon the women of your bed and the servants of your board, aye, upon the children you beget or have begotten. He will destroy that which is yours. He will show you neither pity nor mercy. He will swear his sons to the task. He will devote all his treasure to vengeance, if need be."

"He hath set himself a mighty feat," replied Sir Gui. "My walls have withstood more powerful lords than he."

"They will not protect you from my master."

The Saracen spun his horse in a demivolte, and cantered back to his escort. Three times they tossed their lances in the air, with shrill outcries of derision. Then their cymbals and nakirs sounded a discordant melody, and they galloped off at headlong speed into the sere brown hills that rimmed the desert.

Sir Gui descended from the battlements with an unusually thoughtful look on his reckless face. In the garden beneath the Tower of Winds he met Horazahde.

"Wot you the business I have been upon, dear heart?" he asked.

She nestled against his shoulder.

"Aye, lord."

"And what if I had given you up?"

"Nay, nay," she sobbed. "It may not be. There is that now which binds us twain faster than iron chains."

"Naught binds closer than love," he answered.

But she whispered in his ear, and a great light blazed in his eyes.

"Zounds!" he swore. "We will make him a right puissant man-at-arms!"

The child of Horazahde was born on the Feast of St. Matthew—or, as Fray Gilberto had it in the Italian manner, Matteo—a night of storm and cloudwrack, with the thunder rolling across the hills and the lightning splitting the darkness outside the loopholes of the bower atop of the keep.

Sir Gui cowered by the chamber door, his hands clasped over his ears to dull the screams of agony that slipped like arrowheads between the thunder peals. It was near morning when old Moosha summoned him within and offered for his inspection a squirming bundle of fluffy black hair and pink flesh.

"Is it——"

He hesitated, with a questioning look toward the strangely inert figure on the bed.

"It is a man child," said old Moosha proudly. "Behold how he kicks and strikes, lord. And the voice of him! Ne'er did I behold so sturdy an infant."

"Nay, nay," he answered impatiently. "The Lady Horazahde! Your mistress! She is so——"

He could not bring himself to express his fears, this cruel, relentless border lord, whose own will was his sole guide.

"Fear naught, lord," Moosha reassured him promptly. " 'Tis only that she is exhausted. Before the next night she will be ready to hear your praises."

BUT with the night arrived a herald from Jerusalem, proclaiming the assize of arms. The southern borders of the kingdom were threatened, and the king summoned all his lords to their feudal obligations. When Sir Gui returned a month later his mistress was again in health and the child had grown lustily. But there was friction in his household.

"Lord," began Horazahde, when she had him to herself in the bower, "I have a boon to beg of you."

"Name it, sweet one," he replied.

"That evil old one," she said, "the Hojji——"

"Fray Gilberto?" he asked.

"Aye," she affirmed spitefully; " 'tis he with his dirty robes and his horrid sandals."

"Shall I tire him in silks and damasks?" queried Sir Gui, amused.

"Nay, lord, but send him forth, or perchance, hang him to the justice-tree in the village."

"Why?"

"He hath put a slight upon me."

"What may it have been, dear heart?"

"He gave a name to the child."

"I see no harm in that."

"But he would not give the child the name I wished."

"What name?"

"Yours."

"Ah," said Sir Gui, and he thought deeply. "Doubt not Fray Gilberto had his reasons. Leave this to me."

He rose to go, but tarried at the door.

"What name did Fray Gilberto choose?" he inquired.

"Matteo," spat Horazahde, conveying a load of odium upon the tripping syllables.

Sir Gui smiled and sought the priest.

" 'Tis as she saith," replied Fray Gilberto stoutly. "Look you, Messer Gui, the little one was born out of wedlock, in mortal sin. 'Twas necessary to insure its protection that Holy Church should set the seal of baptism upon him. I might not wait."

"But why reject her desire for my name?" asked Sir Gui.

Fray Gilberto regarded him sidewise.

"Some day, lord, you may wed a lawful wife," he answered in almost the same words that John the Englishman had used. "If that day comes, you will be glad you have not a bastard son named Gui."

"The day will never come," rejoined Sir Gui, "yet you acted out of consideration for my interests, father, and we will say no more."

But Sir Gui did say more. He said it that very night to Horazahde as he lay in her arms while the rushlights teased the flickering shadows that danced upon arras and tapestry and Persian weaves. And as was his habit he spoke directly, without thought of evasion.

"Look you, sweet, there must be peace betwixt you and the priest."

"Why, lord?"

"That he may wed us."

She laughed lightly and stroked his face.

"What talk is this of Frankish rites for a Saracen princess?" she gibed.

"Nay," he insisted. "It may be I have done you wrong. You are no light-o'-love, but my own true mistress, the one——"

"Would you love me more if a dirty priest mumbled words I do not understand?" she asked.

"Nay, yet——"

"Then let us not waste happy moments considering what is not necessary to happiness. Be at ease, fair lord. I am yours; you are mine. No tie that men can make could bind us faster. Your priest means naught to me. He is no better than the filthy old Hojji who lives with my father. They are two of a kind."

Sir Gui was faintly shocked. After all, he had been reared a Christian. Pagan at heart though he was, like most of his generation, he was accustomed to yielding ostensible allegiance to the waxing power of the Church.

"But there is the babe?" he protested.

Horazahde yawned delicately.

"He shall be a puissant man-at-arms, even as you have said, lord, but the words of the priest will not forge his spirit. That shall come from the blood we have welded in him, from the lessons we teach him."

"But——"

Her silken arms pressed him closer.

"Nay, light of my heart," she murmured, "I am yours because you took me. What care I for this Christ your people prate of? I am of the desert. I live for the life that is in me."

Sir Gui crossed himself.

"You speak mortal sin."

"Nay. I have wed you—as I might wed a man of my own people. Hojji or priest—what matters it? They worship what they do not see."

"And you?"

Her voice thrilled with the passion of belief.

"I worship you, dear lord! I need no other faith!"

So Sir Gui gave over the thought of wedlock, and Fray Gilberto's secret hope to convert Horazahde was doomed to disappointment—although she would never stand in the way of the priest's instructing young Matteo as he grew through the years to an age which required schooling.

Those were hard times for the crusading kingdom. The Moslem lords, who had been divided by feuds among themselves, were gradually forgetting their rivalries in the realization that common interests demanded a united front against the Christian menace. A young soldier named Salah-ed-din Yussuf was coming to the front in Syria as a leader of Kurdish mercenaries. And King Baldwin III, one of the grandest of the line of warrior kings who defended the Holy Sepulcher, whose military energy and intelligent statecraft were the main hope of the land, died suddenly of an attack of dysentery in the prime of his life and vigor.

Again and again the Moslem invaders swept the frontiers. Again and again the watchmen on the towers of Nerak sounded the alarm, and bale-fires burned to carry the warning to distant hills and mountain-holds, to warn the Templars under arms at Bethshan and stir the Hospitalers at Jericho. Again and again swift columns of desert horsemen ravaged Sir Gui's fief, and three times during those eventful years the kinsmen of Horazahde filled the castle moat with bodies in white burnouses. Not by any ordinary escalade was Nerak to be taken.

The boy Matteo grew up in this atmosphere of warfare and unrest. He played with weapons instead of toys. Grosjean, the armorer, saw to it that he had sword and hauberk, helm and shield, of proportionate size from his toddling age. Gaspard, the Poitevin, captain of the men-at-arms, taught him the postures of attack and defense and the use of horse and lance. Fray Gilberto schooled him in Latin and Italian. His mother and old Moosha taught him the Saracen tongue. From Sir Antonio and his father he learned the laws of falconry and venerie.

But his closest friend and confidant was Ali Ma'akwaa, the gentle-voiced captain of the Turcoples. It was Ali who strung him his first bow and trained him at the butts outside the castle gate. It was Ali who told him the romances of the Arabian story-tellers, tales bizarre, comic, colorful, eventful, horribly grotesque, splendidly heroic, fantastically comic. It was Ali who made him a gittern such as the jongleurs carried and taught him how to pick melodies from the strings. And it was likewise Ali who rode abroad with him and assisted in the first samplings of adventure in the nearer hills, discoveries of Saracens in every bush, chases of wolves that dwindled into rabbits, pursuits of phantom robber bands and rescues of mythical princesses in distress.

He was a very happy boy, because he had love and friendship around him, and dwelt in a world in which he was a young prince. But this period of his life was bound to end the moment he established contact with the greater world outside his own. And that moment was at hand. Beyond it lay disillusionment, despair, the resentment of defeat, the emptiness of victory, the triumph of abnegation, the glory of love. This is the story of Matteo, of his handicaps and how he overcame them, of his hardships and how he fought them, of his temptations and how he mastered them.

CHAPTER IV

THE BREATH OF ADVENTURE

"NAY, lord, I am no longer a child," protested Matteo.

"No child, but a stripling," derided Sir Gui.

"But, certes, there is no danger," pressed the boy. "Is there not a truce? And Ali hath business to attend to, supervising the work of the masons."

"True," agreed his father doubtfully. "We will ask him. By his decision shall you be judged."

Matteo smiled secretly to himself, for he had scant doubt of Ali's answer.

They crossed the courtyard, and mounted the Squire's Curtain where Ali Ma'akwaa and his Turcoples were laying the stones of the new tower which was designed to bulwark the bare stretch of wall.

Messer Basil Kontades, the Greek engineer, rubbed his hands together and smiled an oily smile. He had evasive eyes and thick lips. A parchment plan protruded from the pocket of his gown.

"The work goes slowly," commented Sir Gui.

"But saw you ever better-laid courses, lord?" argued the Greek. "Good work is slow work, and always will be."

"Nay, but I would have it pressed more vigorously," replied Sir Gui with some temper. "Here we are weeks from the point of raising the inner wall, which I consider the most pressing need. 'Tis a matter of urgence, Messer Knotades."

"It shall be as you direct, lord," assented Kontades, bowing deferentially. "Yet I would please you above all things, and to please you the wall must be strong and properly founded."

" 'Twill serve, I make no doubt," returned Sir Gui. "Ho, Ali, a petition for you to judge upon!"

The captain of the bowmen dropped his measuring-rod and approached them, smiling.

"At your service, lord."

"Nay, not at mine," answered Sir Gui. "This good youth would have me to believe he is fit to venture from the castle alone."

The smile on Ali's face broadened.

"And why not, lord? He hath a hauberk to his back, a full quiver and a sharp sword—and the king hath wrung a general truce from the Soldan of Damascus."

"Would you call him ready to ride unattended?" pressed Sir Gui mockingly.

"Aye, lord. For have not I trained him?"

"True. 'Twould seem you are nigh a man grown, my son."

"Yet you would not grant it to me," objected Matteo.

"Then do I now. Get you gone. And see that you keep a vigilant watch, and do not lose yourself in the hills."

"Ride toward Jordan, Messer Matteo," added Ali. "The desert is no place for the bravest warrior without company."

So it chanced that a few moments later Matteo rode out across the drawbridge bound upon his first venture single-handed. True to Ali's advice, he turned his horse to the left when he came to the desert track at the foot of the castle hill, and cantered in the direction of the hills that blocked the approaches to the valley of the Jordan.

It was Springtime, and even the harsh land of Palestine smiled bravely. The straggling trees were blooming, flowers grew by the wayside, and the hills looked less brown and bare than they would after the Summer heat had come to scorch the foliage and bake the rocks.

Beyond the last peasant's cot in the valley below Mount Zorash Matteo reined in, pondering his plans. Ali and he always had ridden south toward the Dead Sea. Northward, his father's lands marched with those of the "foreign" lord who dwelt in the castle of Mardan. Matteo knew there was small love lost between this man and his father, but he could see no reason why that should prevent his exploring new territory, which, after all, had not been expressly forbidden to him.

The southern hills promised monotony; to the north adventure beckoned. Matteo urged his horse from the path, and turned northward, riding at ease. The country was deserted, but that was not unusual. Everywhere, along the border betwixt Saracen and Christian, human life stopped outside the narrow radius of cultivation which surrounded each town and castle. The open country was given over to the wild things.

Presently, Matteo strung his bow, and pulled an arrow from his quiver. He missed a fox which darted into a burrow; but brought down a hare that hovered upwind, slung the creature to his saddle, and rode on, arrow loosely on the string, eyes scanning the landscape.

It was thus his first adventure came to him.

He noticed suddenly a running figure that topped a long ridge to the west. For an instant this figure stood forth distinctly on the ridge crest. Then it dipped down into a fold of the ground, apparently running toward him. Matteo waited curiously, wondering what the man fled from. He was answered when several larger dots which were men on horseback appeared on the ridge crest, the sun rays flashing from helm and spear tip.

Matteo's interest grew. He held his bow ready, and rode slowly toward the field which he guessed the fugitive would traverse. Sure enough, from behind a clump of olive trees he viewed the fellow, running furiously.

"Stand!" called Matteo.

The man continued to advance, and Matteo repeated the command in the Saracen tongue. This time the fellow halted, with arms raised above his head.

"Mercy, lord!" he gasped, the sweat and dust griming his face. "I have done no injury to any one."

"Who are you?" demanded Matteo.

"I am Kafur."

"And whose man are you?"

"Sinan's."

"Whose?" repeated Matteo, for the name meant nothing to him then.

"Sinan's—he who is the Lord of Death."

"He can not be a good lord to have, Kafur," replied Matteo thoughtfully.

The fugitive looked over his shoulder fearfully, but the pursuers were still hidden by a low intervening hill.

"In the name of mercy, young lord, let me pass," pleaded the man. "If the Templars come up, they will slay me."

"The Templars? Why should they pursue you? We have a truce with your people."

"With the Saracens, yes, lord; but not with my people. The Templars slay us whenever they can."

Matteo stared hard at the man. Under the mask of dirt and sweat he saw a mobile face that combined a certain sensitiveness with determination. The man's eyes met Matteo's unflinchingly.

"Quick!" decided Matteo, snatching the hare from his saddle. "Hold this! You are my attendant. 'Tis too late to run."

Kafur's face lightened with gratitude.

"Kafur will not forget, lord. Come with me behind the olives."

Matteo rode back with him under the shelter of the trees. A hoarse shout echoed from the slope of the near-by hill. The fugitive drew a small box from his girdle, opened it and rapidly smeared his face and neck with the black paste it contained. In a trice he presented the appearance of a negro.

Matteo watched him, fascinated, and as the man commenced to smear his hands he drew from one finger a ring bearing a massy signet.

"Will you take this, lord?" he asked. "It means death for me if 'tis found about me."

Mechanically, Matteo pouched the ring and watched the man conceal the box of paste, beneath a stone. Then Kafur bound a cloth around his head and stood up, a perfect Nubian servant. From the slope of the hill came a chorus of shouts and the clacking of hoofs.

"Come!" said Matteo.

They left the shelter of the olives just as a knight and six men-at-arms dashed into the road.

"Hold, there!" shouted the knight roughly. "Who are you?"

"I am the son of Messer Gui de Taberie."

"The lord of Nerak! And what have you been doing, young sir?"

"We have been hunting hares, messer."

"Saw you a desperate varlet that crossed the road some time since?"

"Aye, messer," answered Matteo more or less truthfully, "he was running for the desert."

"I give you thanks," replied the knight courteously, now quite satisfied. "I pray you commend me to your father."

He called up his men-at-arms, and they tore away across-country, their heavy horses making hard going of the cluttered hillsides.

Matteo watched them out of sight.

"How, now?" he said to Kafur, who had stood by throughout the conversation, with an air of stupid amazement.

"I shall be on my way again, lord, with a sure chance of escape, thanks to you," returned the man.

"And you will do no harm to any in these parts?" pressed Matteo.

"Indeed, lord," replied the fellow earnestly, "my lord would be friends with your people, but the Templars say him nay."

"Of that I know nothing," answered Matteo. "I saved you because I thought you had an honest face. Here is your ring."

He took it from his pouch and extended it to Kafur, but the man drew back.

"No, lord, keep it," he said with a mysterious smile. "Perchance, some day 'twill be useful to you."

"Useful?" said Matteo. "How?"

"Ask your father of the Lord of Death," rejoined Kafur, and without another word he set off at a swift run in a direction diagonal to that he had been following.

MATTEO watched the odd black figure dwindle across the hillsides, and then twisted the ring he had slipped on his finger. It was made of massy silver and bore the device of a hand clutching three knives all set in the one hilt.

"Strange," he muttered to himself. "Well, 'tis a fair exchange. The fellow hath made off with my hare."

He rode on, but turned instantly as a thin cry reached his ears.

"Ho, there, messer!"

Across the fields came a coal-black Arab pony. Astride of it was a slender figure in brown jerkin and breeches, red-gold hair blowing free in the wind, hands firm on the bit. Behind lumbered a boy of Matteo's age mounted on a small war-horse.

Matteo drew rein, and waited. Truly, he mused, this was his lucky day! Two adventures, one upon the other's heels!

The girl on the Arab dashed up beside him in a shower of dust.

"We are pursuing an Assassin!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Did you—Ho, you are only a boy!"

Matteo glowered at her.

"And you are only a girl!" he retorted.

"You are——"

But she thought better of it, and changed her tactics. A merry smile made her blue eyes twinkle.

"Tell me—boy!" she wheedled.

"Tell you what?" countered Matteo.

"Did you see a Templar with a foison of spears chasing an Assassin? One of his men cast a shoe, and told us as we rode from the castle."

"I saw him," answered Matteo.

"And which way did they go?"

"The Templar went that way," said Matteo, pointing.

"Ah, I give you thanks. I will ride on—boy!"

Again the provocative smile. Matteo smiled back. The smile was contagious and he came instantly to two decisions: First, he wanted to see her smile some more; and second, he did not want her to ride off.

" 'Tis useless," he advised her.

"How?" she demanded, becoming haughty. "Ettaire is swifter far than bulky chargers or leg-running Assassins."

"Nay, swiftness doth not enter into it," returned Matteo. "The Templar is at fault."

"How so?"

"Why, the quarry changed his guise and fooled him."

"Changed— But you mock me!"

Matteo smiled derision.

"Nay, lady, for I aided him!"

"You——"

She was breathless.

"Oh, Manasses!" she hailed the boy who accompanied her. "Do you hark to this!"

Manasses, a dour, sullen-faced youth, cantered up and threw a sour glance at Matteo.

"Hark to what?" he growled.

"This—boy—" again the dazzling smile—"hath aided the Assassin to escape!"

"I do not believe it," said Manasses promptly.

"Nay, it matters not whether you believe," observed Matteo softly.

"If you did so, you did a foul wrong, such as no knight would put his hand to," replied Manasses.

Matteo pushed his horse to the other's crupper.

"Will you make good what you have said?" he asked.

The girl clapped her hands.

"Oh, this is better than pursuing an Assassin!" she cried. "Of course, you must fight!"

"Who are you?" returned Manasses.

"My father is the lord of Nerak. And who are you?"

"Nerak?" Manasses stared, then burst into forced laughter. "What right have you to ask a knight's son to fight?"

Matteo's lips set in a straight line; his face was ashen white. But the girl spoke before he could answer.

"Is not his father a knight?" she said. "Phaugh, you are afraid, Manasses!"

"His father may be a knight," replied Manasses, "but his mother is a Saracen caravan-woman."

Matteo leaned forward in his saddle, and struck Manasses with his fist on the point of the jaw. The boy reeled backward, lost his stirrups and fell to the ground. Matteo dismounted and went to his side.

"I am not going to fight you," he announced. "I am going to beat you. But first, you shall tell me your name."

"I am Manasses de Chappes, and my father is the lord of Mardan, and if you touch me you shall die in torment," blustered Manasses, staggering to his feet.

Matteo discarded his helmet, and dropped his bow and quiver beside it.

"I cry your pardon, lady," he said over his shoulder to the girl.

"Nay, nay," she answered. "That was a good clout. Can you do it again?"

"As often as you please," promised Matteo with a grin.

And he did—until Manasses raised his bleeding face and begged for peace.

"What you said was a lie?" demanded Matteo sternly.

"It—was—a—lie," sobbed Manasses.

"Very well. I am satisfied."

Matteo picked up his helm and bow and climbed back into saddle. The girl extended her hand.

"You fought well," she said. "Can you do as well with sword and lance?"

"Nay, lady, I have done no more than fight from a loophole before this," replied Matteo with embarrassment.

"St. Brygas—who is my name saint—be your helper, fair boy! You will be a stout warrior, and I care not who your mother is!"

"Aye, but I care," rejoined Matteo, and his face set in hard lines.

She cried out in protest.

"You mistake me! I meant no harm. But, sooth, 'tis so, if you like it or not!"

"And who may you be?" inquired Matteo, permitting himself another smile.

"I am Brygas de Kergac, and I dwell with my uncle, Messer Renier de Chappes, who is father to that unfortunate wight you misused so cruelly."

This was more than Manasses—who had been stanching a bleeding nose—could support.

"You are unbearable!" he shouted. "I will not stay with you, jade! You may find your own way home—or perchance your new friend will give you escort!"

He vaulted to his saddle, and spurred angrily out of the road.

"Stay, Manasses!" Brygas called after him.

But he paid no heed, and a look of bewilderment drove the smile from her face.

"We had ridden over-far from the castle when we met the Templar's man-at-arms," she said. "I fear me——"

"Nay," answered Matteo, "I will ride with you. Come, let us start. You will not be far behind your cousin."

"But you? 'Tis a long distance from Nerak."

Matteo shrugged his shoulders, as became a warrior grown who had experienced two adventures in the same day.

"It matters not. I joy to be at your service, lady."

Her eyes shone like stars. She found him acceptable, this thin youngster, with the merry brown face and squared shoulders of a man-at-arms.

"Now, do I know you for a very gentle knight!" she declared. "Come, you shall tell me of your exploits as we go."

CHAPTER V

THE VENGEANCE OF ACHMET-IBN-MUROS

IT WAS already dark as Matteo spurred to the edge of the moat and hailed the warders of Nerak. Down the line of the walls he could descry dimly the scaffolding of the new tower which Messer Basil Kontades was building to strengthen the Squire's Curtain.

"Who comes?" was the answer to his shout.

"Messer Matteo!"

The chains and pulleys clacked and whined. He waited, impatient, and leaped his horse upon the planks while the drawbridge was still a foot above the coping of the moat.

"Ho, Messer Matteo, you are late on your first lone venture afield," chided Sir Antonio, the seneschal, as he trotted through the gateway.

The warders, already at work winding up the draw, grinned good-naturedly. Ali Ma'akwaa, too, stepped from the shadows, with a look of inquiry.

"I have ridden as far as Mardan," answered Matteo.

"No signs of——"

"I saw naught save a Templar and some sergeants pursuing a man they called an Assassin—oh, and two who had ridden from Mardan to watch the chase."

"The lord of Mardan is no friend of ours," said the seneschal grimly. "But your father sits at meat in the hall. Go, quickly, Matteo. He hath asked for you. But for Ali's assurance we would have ridden in search of you."

"I am thankful there is one among you knows I am past childhood," rejoined Matteo with heat. "Ali, I give you——"

He swung down from his horse as he spoke, and the blaze of a cresset shone on the huge ring with the insignia of the triple-bladed knife. Ali, who had been holding the horse's bridle, leaped backward with a jerk.

"That!" he cried. "Where got you that, Messer Matteo?"

"What?" replied Matteo. "Oh, the ring! Why, from the Assassin I spoke of."

Ali was trembling with excitement. He seized Matteo's hand, and held it up to the light.

"See," he appealed to Sir Antonio. "'Tis the signet of the Old Man—the Sheikh al Jebal!"

"The Old Man of the Mountain!" exclaimed the seneschal. "What traffic have you had with him, Matteo?"

"None," said Matteo, surprized. "But I helped the Assassin to escape from the Templar, and he gave me the ring."

"'Tis a splendid gift," said Sir Antonio. "Never saw I the like. But, come, you must repeat the tale to your father."

They crossed the courtyard, and climbed the stairs which led to the big double doors that gave entrance to the great hall. At the high table Sir Gui and Horazahde sat side by side, Sir Gui dressed in a costume of red velvet and Horazahde wearing her tall, peeked hat of state and robes of precious silks fetched by Saracen merchants out of Cathay.

On her feet were little shoes beaded with pearls that had been fashioned by a Genoese of Tripoli. Around her neck and in her hair were gems worth a king's ransom. She was older than on that day she came to Nerak, but her face glowed with the proud happiness that mirrors no regrets.

Sir Antonio took his place at the board, and Matteo bowed low and kissed his mother's hand.

"What, now, cockerel?" demanded his father with mock anger. "I give you the liberty of manhood, and you shamefully abuse it."

"Nay, lord," said Matteo. "I have met adventure."

"Adventure, forsooth! And what?"

So Matteo repeated the story of his meeting with the Assassin, and his father's eyes kindled with interest and his mother listened in a silent enjoyment too deep for words.

"What say you, Antonio?" asked Sir Gui when the tale was ended with the disappearance of the Assassin—for Matteo added nothing at that time of his meeting with the boy and girl from Mardan.

"I say 'tis an extraordinary tale," replied the seneschal. "That is the signet of Sinan, himself, which Matteo wears. 'Tis a potent weapon, so men say."

"But who is Sinan?" cried Matteo. "And why is it a potent weapon? 'Tis no more than a silver ring, and dirty!"

"Sinan is the Lord of Death," began his father, "so called by his followers. His formal title is the Sheikh al Jebal, which our people render as the Old Man of the Mountain. He rules a race of queer Saracen folk——"

"Not so, lord," interposed Horazahde with spirit. "Grant me familiarity enough with my own people to know those who may claim their mantle. The followers of the Old Man of the Mountain are no children of the Prophet. They began by blaspheming the Koran, and now, men say, they have become believers in nothing, save it be the certainty of reward after death for those who slay as their lord directs."

"How know you of these folk, dear heart?" inquired Sir Gui.

"Their country is not many leagues' journey from Emesa, where I was born," she answered. "More than one of our emirs has died under the knives of the Old Man."

"Where is this country of theirs?" asked Matteo, breathlessly.

"It lies between the borders of Tripoli and Antioch," explained his father, "in the midst of a wild tangle of mountains. A circle of mighty castles defend it, and the Templars, whose castles are on its frontiers, have had many debates with the Old Man."

"But why does the Old Man slay people and why do the Templars fight with him?"

"The Old Man rules through fear," said Sir Antonio. "Is it not so, lady?"

" 'Tis so," returned Horazahde. "He wrings tribute from all surrounding lords, Christian and Saracen, aye, from far-off pagan princes, through their fear that his remorseless slayers will seek them out in castle or palace, on the sea or by the wayside. Once the Old Man has bidden his people to slay they may not be turned aside. If one or an hundred die, there are others to take their places. Only the Templars do not fear him, because if one Grand Master is slain 'tis easy to choose another. The Old Man knows this, and he fears the Templars, who persecute him and his people whenever they may and would ravage his land, but for the strong fortresses that seal every pass."

Matteo shuddered.

"I like him not," he said. "Yet the man I aided was a pleasant seeming fellow."

"No doubt," agreed his father. "Sinan hath agents of every sort."

"Aye, emissaries in every place," corroborated Horazahde. "My son, do not despise your ring. It may yet serve at need. But never let a Templar see it."

She rose gracefully, a figure slender and beautifully tall.

"I cry your leave to withdraw, sweet lord. Matteo, you must be less venturesome. Had the Templar suspected you, he would have slain you out of hand for an agent of Sinan meeting your accomplice by appointment."

When she had gone, Sir Antonio excused himself to attend his duties, and Matteo drew nearer to his father. They were alone, for Fray Gilberto was watching by the bedside of a sick woman.

"I have not told all, lord," began Matteo.

His father bent a keen glance upon him.

"What mean you, boy?"

Matteo described hurriedly, in as few words as possible, his meeting with Brygas de Kergac and Manasses de Chappes. His father did not interrupt him, even when he came to the account of his fight with de Chappes. And at the conclusion a silence overspread the two, sitting within the narrow circle of light that marked out the high table.

"You did well," said Sir Gui at length with an effort that was manifest to the boy. His brow furrowed, his hand traced meaningless signs in the wine lees on the table before him. "Aye, you did well. I can find no fault with you."

For a fleeting moment a glint of humor showed in his eyes.

"And the damsel thought likewise! A rare spirit!"

Silence again. Then:

"I did wrong. John the Englishman foretold it. So did Fray Gilberto. But it falls out otherwise than as they predicted."

Once more, silence.

"You must never think ill of your mother, boy. 'Tis for me to bear the blame. Ah, well! As for de Chappes and his cub, I would kill them if they breathed another word against her. But 'tis time you were taken from this border life. I see it now. 'Tis a lesson to me. Aye, you shall go to Antioch—to John the Englishman, who still bides at the court of Prince Bohemond —and set your feet upon the high road of life. This is well enough, but you must have more than a sword and a shield to make your way withal."

"What?" asked Matteo.

"Knowledge—and friends. See you, Matteo, there is a Genoese of Tripoli, Messer Gambaglio, who hath charge of my moneys. To him shall you go, and he will dispatch you to Antioch by one of his ships."

"When?"

"Nay, I must speak first with your mother. This is enough for tonight. The hour grows late."

A varlet stole up from the shadows as they left, and pinched out the rush-lights, one by one, until only a single cresset, burning in its iron holder, illumined the empty reaches of the great hall. Sir Gui parted with his son in the corridor whence branched the stairs that led to Horazahde's bower in the topmost story of Gui's Tower; Matteo climbed a corkscrew stair in the main structure of the inner ward to his own chamber which fronted the rear of the castle defenses.

THE STRIPPED off his garments rapidly, thinking of the events of the day, surely the most eventful he had ever known. And now he was to go out into the world, to Tripoli, the big city in the north which men said rivaled Jerusalem and was surpassed only by the fabulous richness of Byzantium! He lay down on his couch, and turned this thought in his mind—and slept. But it seemed to him he had been sleeping no time at all when a hand clutched at his shoulder and began shaking him and an imperative voice resounded in his ear.

"Messer Matteo! Messer Matteo! Wake! Prithee, wake! For your life, Messer Matteo!"

He threw off the hand, and struggled to a sitting position, digging his knuckles into his eyes. Beside him crouched Ali Ma'akwaa, a dripping sword in one hand. Through the windows hummed a chorus of yells and screams. The roof was crimsoned by huge gusts of flame outside.

"What is it?" gasped Matteo.

Ali snatched up clothing and the boy's hauberk.

"The Saracens are upon us! Haste! We shall be slain!"

Matteo scrambled into hose and jerkin, suffered Ali's practised fingers to draw the hauberk over head and shoulders.

"How chanced it?" he panted, clapping on his helmet and buckling his sword-belt.

"That cursed Greek, lordling! Ah, I knew him for a traitor when I first saw his evil face! Why did I not speak to the master—before it was too late?"

"Too late!" echoed Matteo. "Never, Ali! We shall drive them forth. Why, they will be caught in the castle like so many rats."

Ali shook his head.

"You should have seen them swarming over the Squire's Curtain. They are a vast host. And the Greek will conduct them through the castle. No, lordling, we may be able to hold the keep, but I fear not. Come, we must find Lord Gui."

The captain of the Turcoples opened the door cautiously, and led the way into the corridor. Flickering torches of resin-wood burned at intervals. Panic-stricken servants darted here and there. Once, as they crossed a place where two corridors came together, they heard the clatter of blades and the shrill war-cry of the Saracens.

They descended the corkscrew stair, and from a loophole Matteo saw the pent-sheds and stables in the courtyard blazing to the battlements and fighting going on between isolated groups of the garrison and the invaders. The stair gave upon another corridor, and this, in turn, ended in a second flight of stairs descending to the level of the great hall. Ali took them three at a bound, but he brought up short at the foot as a mob of Saracens in dirty white surcoats poured into the lower corridor.

"Back! Back!" he shouted. "We are too late!"

The pursuers were after them in full cry. They ran down the length of the upper corridor, and hurled themselves through a door which gaped wide. It was a cumbrous, iron-bound affair of oak, and Ali set his shoulder to it and slammed the bolts into place in time to make good their retreat.

They were in a long, low-roofed room, lined on one side by a series of parapeted arches, the gallery overlooking the great hall.

"We must try another path, messer—" Ali started to say.

"Hark!" exclaimed Matteo.

The clash of steel, a sudden burst of outcries, sounded beneath them. Matteo sped to the parapet, leaned out—and started back with a scream. Ali Ma'akwaa leaped to his side, and placed a steadying hand upon his arm. Truly. it was a scene of terror they looked down upon. The dead bodies of Sir Antonio, Fray Gilberto, a squire and several men-at-arms lay by the door which led to the courtyard. In the doorway hovered the leering face of Messer Basil Kontades, the Greek engineer.

On the edge of the dais Sir Gui stood alone, sword in hand, a surcoat hastily thrown over his shirt, his shield slashed and split. Behind him, leaning against the high table, her night-shift half-slipping from one lovely shoulder, stood Horazahde. Her magnificent hair fell in a torrent of blackness to veil her white beauty; her face was serene and unafraid.

Around the pair swirled a torrent of Saracen warriors, whose silvery chain-mail glittered through rents in their soiled surcoats; whose white hoods were thrown back from their peaked helmets; whose fierce eyes glared on either side of the vizards which guarded nose and chin.

Two of the invaders stood apart from the fight, one a tall old man with a long gray beard and an aquiline Semitic face, the other of stalwart middle-age, cruel featured, hard eyed. Their simitars were bared, and they watched with a kind of hungry pleasure the gradual weakening of Sir Gui's defense against overpowering numbers.

As a dagger-stroke crippled Sir Gui's shield-arm, the older man shouted an order, and the Saracens stepped back.

"Do you know me?" rasped the gray-beard.

"I can hazard a guess," replied Sir Gui wearily. "But of what avail? Make an end."

"In good time," returned the gray-beard. "If you do not know me, the woman beside you does. Say, wanton, is my face familiar to you?"

"You were once my father, Achmet-ibn-Muros," answered Horazahde clearly.

"Aye, and this man beside me is the Emir El-Afdel, whose harem you were to enter."

Horazahde made no answer, but Sir Gui lifted his sword impatiently.

"All of this I guessed. Let us finish it out. Paradise awaits some few of you in this blade."

"You thought I had forgotten your insult," continued Achmet-ibn-Muros, without noticing the defiance. "Your Frankish wit could not grasp the fact that an Arab can wait a lifetime for revenge."

"The wisest and the bravest fall before treachery," said Sir Gui impassively. "I trusted the Greek."

Matteo could contain himself no longer.

"And if the wise and the brave fall by treachery, the treacherous and the false shall die to give vengeance for them!" he cried.

The Moslems retreated hastily. Matteo set his hand to the parapet.

"Hold, father! I come!"

But Ali grasped him by the arm, and while the two struggled, Sir Gui and Horazahde looked up. Horazahde was silent; her eyes spoke for her. But Sir Gui's voice rang out with the resonant confidence that had steadied many a hard-fought field.

"Nay, Matteo! Down here is death. Live for revenge, sweet son! Ali, I charge you, guard the boy. By the postern of the Tower of Winds there is a rope for letting messengers down the cliff."

Matteo hesitated, but not so Achmet-ibn-Muros. The prince of Emesa waved his hand, and his men rolled forward like a flood of white wolves.

"Allah-il-Allah!" shouted the Emir El-Afdel, joining the onslaught.

The Saracens ringed Sir Gui with a circle of steel. He strove to ward them off; but his shield-arm was useless, his sword was engaged in front and on both sides. El-Afdel thrust through his groin, as another blade hacked into his right shoulder. He sank beneath a shower of blows, and Horazahde threw herself forward in a desperate effort to protect his body. Her arms enfolded him as her breast received the point of El-Afdel's dagger, and her blood mingled with that of the man she loved.

Achmet-ibn-Muros stepped forward with a fierce light of satisfaction on his face.

"Strike off their heads!" he ordered. "We will set them before the ruins of Nerak for a warning to these Frankish lords that their sins shall be punished."

CHAPTER VI

OUTCAST

"LET me go!" sobbed Matteo.

"Nay, use reason, lord," pleaded Ali. "You heard the order given."

"I will slay them! I will slay them, if I perish in the doing of it!"

Ali strove patiently, all his lithe strength gently exerted, and drew the boy from the parapet as an arrow shivered against a pillar.

"In time," he promised. "But now there is no use. Think, lord! You might not hope to reach those you sought in the press below."

He coaxed Matteo toward a door in the opposite wall.

"Come," he said. "We have scant time if we are to win clear. Another day we shall seek vengeance, Messer Matteo. Tonight we must obey Lord Gui. 'Twas his last order."

Matteo abandoned his struggle. His young face was set in rigid lines.

"You are right, Ali," he admitted. " 'Tis foolishness to risk death for nothing tonight. Nay, we shall live—and I will have my vengeance when I can. Ah, blessed apostle whose name I bear, grant me the lives of those who have slain all that is dear to me! I ask no more! I ask no less!"

The door by which they had entered echoed the pounding of a beseiging mob.

"There is little time, lord," reminded Ali. "Doubt not we shall live to carry death to Emesa."

"Aye, death to Emesa!" answered Matteo, dumbly following the lead of the captain of the Turcoples. "I swear it, Ali."

"And your oath shall be my oath, lord."

He opened the opposite door, which let them out upon a secret stair twisting downward in the thickness of the wall. It ended in a turret on the ground floor of the rearward mass of the inner ward, and as this section of the castle offered no known chance of escape, the adjacent corridors were deserted. They reached the Tower of Winds, barred its postern behind them and so entered the garden in safety. On a hook by the postern they found the rope Sir Gui had told them of. Ali fastened one end to a stunted cedar near the wall, and they made short work of the descent of the cliff, aided by knots placed at regular intervals and the sloping surface of the rock.

On level ground, however, their troubles began. They required horses, and the only horses were under guard of the Saracens. Creeping through the undergrowth at the cliff foot, they gained a position whence they could reach the outer herd of the raiders, turned loose to graze on the stubbly grass.

In the half light two men who did not hurry aroused no concern. They picked their mounts, and rode clear as one of the herd-guards cantered toward them.

"Hi," he called. "Whose horses do you think——"

"We ride for the Emir El-Afdel," replied Ali coldly.

"I care not who you ride for," returned the herd-guard sturdily. "No desert thief can——"

Ali leaned forward and stabbed the man neatly through the jugular. He died without a gurgle.

"Allah curse you!" cried a comrade of the victim who beheld the deed from a safe distance. "Are there not Franks enough——"

"He spoke of desert thieves," rejoined Ali softly. "Perchance you, too, have comments to make, brother?"

The herd-guard turned aside.

"Go your way," he grumbled, "but I shall know you again."

The fugitives rode on. There was nothing more to stay them. The Saracens had no sentries out, for these who were not looting the castle were murdering and burning in the village that had fancied there was protection in Lord Gui's mighty walls.

"Whither, now?" asked Ali as they guided their horses into the westward track.

Matteo hesitated.

"There is a duty to be done," he decided. "We must raise the country."

"Aye, lord?"

"We ride for Mardan."

"The lord of Mardan was no friend to Lord Gui."

"He is a Christian, Ali. His private hate will be forgotten in the need to defend the land."

They inclined to the north along the lower slopes of Mount Zorash. Behind them the eastern sky suddenly kindled.

"Can it be the sun so soon?" asked Matteo.

But Ali turned in his saddle and pointed back without a word. The boy's gaze followed his finger. A pillar of fire towered over Nerak. In the lurid glare the stone shell of the castle was as distinct as a skeleton drawn in white chalk upon a red canvas.

Matteo's eyes hardened.

"I shall not forget," he said shortly.

Not once again did he look behind him, although throughout their ride Nerak loomed upon the skyline, first as a flaming torch, later as a blot of smoke that writhed like an animal in its death throes.

Toward morning they came to Mardan, a castle on a hillside above a streamlet that watered a succulent valley. The warders lowered the draw, seeing they were but two, and permitted them to enter.

"I would have speech with your lord," said Matteo to the squire who asked him his business.

"I am the son of the Lord of Nerak, who is dead. The Saracens have slain him and my mother and burned the castle and ravaged our lands."

The squire pursed his lips thoughtfully. He was a fox-faced Navarrese who neighed like a Spaniard.

"So that was the blaze the warders cried in the night! 'Twill be a welcome relief to our lord."

Matteo eyed him uncomprehendingly.

"How, messer?"

The squire favored him with a mean grin.

"Be at your ease here," answered the Navarrese, waving his hand toward the courtyard in which Matteo still sat his horse, having received no invitation to dismount. "I will inform Lord Renier of your presence."

When he had left Matteo looked about him. The castle was smaller than Nerak, but more compact and therefore more easily defended.

"It seems they are not very civil here," muttered Ali in his ear.

"Why do you say that?" asked Matteo.

"Would messengers like ourselves have waited long for a cup of wine and a bite of bread at Nerak?"

"Ah, but Nerak is no more, Ali!" said Matteo sadly.

"What is that, boy?" cried an eager voice from a loophole in the keep above his head. "What do you say of Nerak?"

Matteo stared up into the merry face of the girl he had met the day before. He bowed his head.

"Aye, Lady Brygas," he answered wearily. "Nerak is no more. And I am an orphan. The Saracens gained entrance by treachery last night."

The tears sprang into her blue eyes.

"Oh, Holy Virgin, what a dreadful thing! My heart breaks for you, fair boy. But what do you here?"

"I came to tell Messer Renier that he might muster his people and smite the Saracens before they cross the desert."

She thrust her head farther from the wide loophole.

"Never delude yourself!" she exclaimed. "He hates you. He will do nothing to aid you. If you could have heard the words that were poured upon me last night for having even spoken to you! Not that I heeded them! But——"

Her head was withdrawn abruptly, and Matteo looked around for a cause. He perceived it at once in the approach of the squire who had received him, accompanied by two others, a man and the boy Manasses, whom he had beaten in front of Brygas.

THE man was the lord of Mardan. Renier de Chappes was years older than he had been that night he came with John the Englishman to Nerak before Matteo was born, grosser and heavier set; but his face still bore the arrogant expression of one who considers himself a favorite of fate.

"So you are Gui de Taberie's bastard!" he remarked, standing with legs spread broad before Matteo's horse.

The squire and young Manasses snickered. Matteo's face flushed crimson, then went dead white in a manner he had when anger took him. So swiftly that none could say him nay, he pushed his horse alongside of Messer Renier and whipped his dagger from its sheath.

"Take heed of your words!" he said quietly, and dropped the point of the dagger on Messer Renier's collar-bone.

Messer Renier snorted with wrath.

"Ho, there in the guard-room!" he hailed. "A bowman to shoot me this saucy knave!"

Ali Ma'akwaa urged his horse behind young de Chappes. His sword was out.

"If I so much as see a shaft drawn, 'twill mean this youth's death," he promised.

There came a clapping of hands overhead.

"'Tis like a romaunt, in sooth," declared a breathless voice.

Despite himself and the seriousness of the moment, Matteo could not resist a smile of amusement. And the applause stiffened his backbone.

"I came here, Messer Renier, not because I wished to trespass on your courtesy or because there was aught vital you might do for me," he said. "I came only because I deemed 'twas my duty to warn you of the danger that was abroad. Despite the truce, Achmet-ibn-Muros, prince of Emesa, hath slain my father and mother, burned Nerak and despoiled our people."

"Even so," sneered Messer Renier. "And he will harm nobody else. There is a truce, as you say. Achmet-ibn-Muros will return to Emesa with his spoils, and if King Amalric makes protests of what he hath done, he will reply that destroying Nerak was no act of warfare but a deed of private vengeance—and every Saracen prince will uphold him."

Matteo frowned down upon him.

"And will you not take a foison of spears and harry his retreat for the love of Christ and the honor of Christendom?"

Again the clapping of hands overhead.

"I would not move a step to revenge Gui de Taberie," growled de Chappes. "As for you, when you laid your hands on my son you sealed your doom. Aye, and I will carry the word to the Templars that you rescued an Assassin out of their hands!"

"If you live!" jibed Matteo, and a red mist veiled his eyes as he drove the dagger-point an inch into the flesh.

"Slay him not, lord!" advised Ali. "We can use him and the young one to win free."

"Good words," assented Matteo, the madness passing.

A reckless humor possessed him.

"You, messer," he addressed the goggling Navarrese squire, "fetch us wine and bread."

The squire looked aslant at his master and departed.

" 'Twill make a brave tale for noble lords to hear!" remarked Matteo reflectively.

"You fool, do you think any will heed you?" snorted de Chappes. "Your word against Renier de Chappes! Why, boy, within the year the fief that was your father's will be mine. When next you ride this way the banner of de Chappes will float over Nerak."

"Mayhap—if you live," said Matteo. " 'Twill be no fault of mine if your villainy doth not reach the king's ears."

They waited in silence until the squire returned with two flagons and a loaf.

"Taste them!" directed Matteo.

The man obeyed, and Matteo drank deep of the flagon, then passed it to Ali. The loaf he tucked under his bridle arm.

"Doth my blade irk you?" he asked.

The blood had soaked Messer Renier's jerkin, but he made no complaint.

"I bide my time," replied the lord of Mardan.

"I salute you, lord," mocked Matteo. "You have courage—as your son hath not, or I am grievously amiss. But now, I regret, we must be gone. May I trouble you to walk slowly at my side across the draw? Aye, so! I thank you."

He turned once in his saddle and waved the loaf toward the loophole overhead.

"Farewell," he called.

A bubble of laughter answered him, and he was content.

So the procession crossed the courtyard. First, Matteo and Messer Renier walking beside him, the dagger tip in Messer Renier's flesh; next, Ali, with sword drawn, shepherding Manasses. The soldiers of the garrison stood impotently by the score, and looked and wondered.

When they had passed the drawbridge, Matteo halted.

" 'Tis enough, Messer Renier," he said coldly. "You may return. If you wish to pursue us, you may do so. We shall not flee with undue haste. Slay us, if you choose. I do assure you 'twill be the one deed will wreck your plan to inherit Nerak."

Messer Renier's face twisted in a grimace that was due partly to pain and partly to exasperation. But he made no answer, and as Matteo and Ali rode slowly down the path that led toward the Jordan, he and his son recrossed the draw—no less slowly.

"Ali," said Matteo, and the Turcople advanced to his crupper. "Here is half the loaf. The ride was worth the issue, was it not?"

Ali grinned.

"It was worth much! Ah, lord, if Messer Gui could have seen it!"

Matteo's face saddened.

"I think I am no longer a boy, Ali," he replied. "Something within me hath broken, and I feel the stronger for it."

They rode without speaking until the towers of Mardan were buried behind the hills.

"Whither, now, lord?" inquired Ali.

"I think we shall fare to Antioch," answered Matteo, considering. "Last night my father spoke of my tarrying for a while at Prince Bohemond's court. He had a friend there, a Messer John the Englishman——"

"Aye, lord, I know him!" exclaimed the Turcople. "A valiant fighter and a singer of brave songs!"

"So? My heart warms to him. My father loved him, and that means much. What say you, Ali, shall we journey to Antioch?"

Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"Wherever you say, lordling. It matters not to me."

Matteo's eye glistened.

"You are sure you wish to follow an unknown adventurer, a lord without a name? You heard what Messer Renier called me? And you are a good fighting man, Ali. You may have excellent terms from any lord—or the Templars or Hospitalers will retain you."

"You are my lord," returned Ali doggedly. "In ill luck or good luck, I follow you. You are your father's son."

"Then let us on to Antioch. 'Tis a far journey."

CHAPTER VII

HOW MATTEO BECAME A JONGLEUR

BY THE Jordan ford they met a foison of Hospitalers from Jericho, who had been dispatched to verify the rumors brought in by excited Poulani villeins, of a Saracen raid. To the knight in command Matteo told his story, and then pushed on with a message to the lord prior at Jericho.

"We ride with every spear," exclaimed the prior before Matteo had completed the tale of Nerak's loss. " 'Tis unlikely the paynims will await us, but at least we will pursue them into the desert. How comes it Messer de Chappes hath sent us no word? Is he safe? Perchance the Saracens have slain him, too."

"Nay," answered Matteo bitterly, "his hold is safe. I passed it. But he regarded my father as an enemy."

The prior pursed his lips, the while a lay brother buckled on his armor.

"St. John aid us! 'Tis inconceivable a Christian knight would watch another perish in jealousy! Guard your words, youth."

Matteo bowed his head.

"You asked, lord. I answered."

"Aye, and speak not so to others less mindful of your grief than I. You are a lad, unspurred. Messer de Chappes is a great lord. Make no more enemies than you can help. But enough! I hear the trumpets of the brethren sounding in the court. Do you bide here so long as may be convenient and take such rest and refreshment as you need."

He clanked into the corridor, and Matteo swallowed hard.

" 'Tis so," muttered Matteo to himself. "Even as de Chappes hath said, who will take my word against his?" He raised his clenched fist in a gesture of denunciation. "But let him bide! Aye, let him bide! I shall not always be young and powerless. My time will come, and when it doth I will crush him under the desert sand."

The boy's tense muscles quivered with the force of his hatred, but he regained his self-control as the prior's lay servitor reentered the room to announce the preparation of a meal. He guided Matteo to a private chamber in the guest-wing of the commandery, and left the boy to himself. Ali already had been made comfortable in the quarters assigned to the commonalty.

Matteo rested the remainder of that day and through the night, and, to say truth, his vigorous youth reacted swiftly to a sufficiency of sleep and food. He set out upon his journey again in the morning with a heart that was really clamoring to be gay, although whenever Ali or some incident of the road distracted his attention he strove the harder to concentrate his hatred against de Chappes and Achmet-ibn-Musa and the Emir El-Afdel.

But try as he might to keep the frown on his face, there were moments when he joyed in the sunlight, in the soft wind upon his face and the strange sights they met, for he had never wandered so far afield.

They rode by way of Nablus, and in the dusk of evening came to Karoon by the Horan brook. There was no monastery near by, and the travelers turned, as a matter of course, to the hospitality of the castle. In the outer court, a squire met them, and appointed a man-at-arms to show Ali to the stables, then conducted Matteo to the great hall, where the trestle-tables were spread for the lord's company.

Matteo and his guide took their places above the salt on the benches reserved for the squires and castle priests, and when the lord and his lady entered and sat at the high board on the dais, they fell to upon the ample provender of beef, fowls, leeks, pasties and wine. As they ate, Matteo was plied with questions, and the narration of the circumstances of the attack on Nerak attracted the attention of the knights higher up the board, until a group was clustered close around his seat, listening with avidity to a story that was only too frequent in that stormy land.

Now, as it chanced, there were no guests on the dais that night, no tumblers, minstrels or trouveres to divert the lord and his lady. And marking the interest which Matteo aroused, the lady besought her lord to order the strange youth to appear before them. So a page tapped Matteo on the shoulder, and presently, he found himself bowing low to the two who sat alone at the high table.

"Who are you, messer?" asked the lord.

Matteo thought quickly. Quickly, he came to a decision. In a land where birth counted for all and chivalry was flowering to perfection, he might not bear to flaunt false colors.

"My name is Matteo, lord," he replied. "I am son to Messer Gui de Taberie——"

"The lord of Nerak!" exclaimed his host. "I wot him well! A brave knight and a sturdy!"

"But, alas, no more," sighed Matteo.

"What? ——be my hearer! What is this?"

"Nay, lord, he died not two days since."

"But how?" interrupted the lady eagerly, scenting a goodly tale. "Nerak is strong."

Matteo's eyes met hers, and strayed involuntarily to a gittern on a stool beside her chair. And as if by magic, without forethought on his part, a flow of words welled from his brain, fluttered on his tongue. The sad memories gathered in rhymes and verses, in orderly sentences and paragraphs, clamoring to be loosed. He caught up the gittern with a faint gesture of apology.

"Is it permitted to entertain so nobly-born a couple with a romaunt no less diverting that 'tis true?" he asked in the fashion he had heard stray jongleurs use.

"Aye, and indeed, pretty boy," replied the lady, well pleased at the prospect. "Do your devoir, and there shall be largesse for you, if largesse you crave."

"For myself I crave naught," answered Matteo, plucking the strings. "But I have a vengeance to seek, and aid for that I will not deny. Now, gentles, hark to my lay.

"They sing:

"Thick as —— was the evil night
When the red flames leaped in my eyes,
And the paynims swarmed thro' the castle
And murdered my lord, the wise,
The good, the brave, the valiant,
The best spear of the king!
Ah, God, give breath for the curses,
Give strength for the hate that I bring!
Ah, gentles, open your purses,
For my tale is fitly told,
If the red, red blood that seams it
Is splashed with ruddy gold,
Gold that I need for vengeance—
The death of my father's foes!"

The lady of the castle sat enthralled with the tears dimming her eyes. Her lord's bluff face was flushed with emotion. All around the dais clustered knight and squire, priest and clerk. In the dark background the men-at-arms, archers and varlets squatted on the rush-strewn floor, mouths gaping wide, eyes glued on the slender youth, whose ringing voice, now in verse and now in cadenced prose, swept them along a stream of emotion out beyond the hide-bound barriers of their little lives.

They did not know it, but they were listening for the first time to "The Romaunt of Death," which was to become the corner-stone of Matteo's future fame, which was to be sung at every court of Outremer and carried by wandering minstrels to the farthest confines of Europe, adapted and changed, pirated and altered out of its original shape, but persisting through the ages as a true remnant of the age of chivalry.

And in after days the lord and lady of Karoon would recite with pride how the great jongleur, Matteo of Antioch, whose name was a household word in the Holy Land, had chanted his first lay before them and received his first largesse in the shape of a golden bezant from the lord's purse.

By such slender threads are the currents of life diverted. Matteo had been invited to the high table. He was over-tensed by emotion. He chanced to see the gittern. An idea was born in his brain. Fate, which had begun the coil, had only to carry it on, and Fate was not loath to assume the task. But a truce to philosophy. We return to Matteo, flushed and exalted by his maiden effort, louting, gittern in hand, on the dais-step, his impromptu romaunt done.

SILENCE hung over the castle hall. The lady was in ardent tears. The lord extended a hand which fell in friendly grip on Matteo's shoulder.

"Well sung, lad!" he applauded. "Hast

great promise for a jongleur of your years. Glad am I to add to your store of vengeance. God send you success."

"But, ah, zounds, what a sore pity for you, pretty boy!" cried the lady. "Father and mother dead—and you may not bear your father's name!"

"That is true, lady!" said Matteo, resolved not to blink the fact.

"Nay, do not depress the youth," urged her lord. "He hath a fine fancy and a keen wit. He shall go far in the world."

They made much of him, would have listened to him until cock-crow; and when he laughingly declined to pursue his store of Saracen tales past midnight he was led to the best chamber of the keep and made to sleep between sheets of Damascus linen. In the morning the lady of the castle gave him a stirrup-cup with her own hands, and the lord walked with him to the gate.

"Tarry with us a while," suggested the lord at parting. "Good company is not readily come by, and here you shall have all that your heart may desire."

"Nay, messer, I may not," returned Matteo, "for ere he died my father laid a command upon me, and I go to execute it."

"Then, if you may not stay, visit Karoon next time you ride Jordanward."

"Aye, right willingly, fair sir."

They clasped hands beneath the portcullis, and with Ali at his heels, Matteo rode over the draw and took the road for Nablus. He was in no mood for glooming this day. His eyes found delight in all that passed; a song rose to his lips.

Ali perceived the lifting of his master's spirits, and at the end of the town precincts clinked up alongside of him.

"Rare luck we had yon, Messer Matteo," he observed, jerking a thumb backward over his shoulder.

"Aye," agreed Matteo, "and if only I might come by a gittern my fears for the road would be gone forever."

"Why, let us e'en take the first one we come upon," suggested Ali practically.

"Nay, nay, we may not become robbers. In sooth, Ali, my heart beats more freely for knowing that I have this gift. Yet I give due thanks to you and old Moosha that taught me."

His face clouded momentarily at recollection of old Moosha and the life she had represented, a life gone forever. But buoyant spirits would not be denied. A palmer by the wayside cried a blessing on him, and Matteo tossed the holy man a copper penny from his new-won store.

At Belvoir that night they were directed to a home of the Gray Friars, and in the refectory after supper the good monks plied them with questions, for the monks were the chroniclers of the land and gained their knowledge of all that passed from such chance intercourse and the exchange of gossip betwixt the different monastic establishments.

When the master of the novices heard that Matteo could play and sing, he insisted that the brethren should be entertained and even sent for the prior.

"But, I beseech you, gentle youth," he said, "make your romaunt instructive as well as diverting, and eschew all follies of female guile and love-idleness, for 'tis not befitting that we men of God should hark to such trivialities."

Now, as it chanced, Matteo had been turning in his mind a new lay which had come to him in the music of his horse's hoofs throughout the long day on the twisting road. A caravan of merchants, with jingling pack-mules, had halted at a crossroads to permit the passage of a party of knights and lords riding to attend a tourney at Mirabel; and in the neighboring fields the hinds had suspended their sluggish labor to eye the contrasting colors of the scene. In that moment there had come to Matteo a realization of the essence of his age, and his mind had sought mechanically to turn it into rhyme.

"Gladly will I try, holy father," he made answer to the master of the novices, "but as you see, I lack gittern or other instrument for accompaniment."

"Of that no difficulty shall be made," retorted the monk. "There are instruments of many kinds in the chantry, for 'tis our belief that any sweet sound is pleasant in Monseigneur God's ear."

A lay brother fetched several gitterns for Matteo's choice; the prior himself arrived, and was duly enthroned at the head of the refectory; the monks in their several orders and degrees gathered at the tables; and Matteo was led out before them all.

It was no romaunt for alternate singing and recitation he gave them, but a simple lay, that in after-years was sung through the length and breadth of Outremer, "The Lay of the Gentle and the Simple":

"The lord in his castle,
The hind in his hut,
The world is between them,
Yet in the same rut
They hate and they hunger,
They thirst and they lust,
They strive for they know not,
They do what they must."

It tells how a hind conceived a desire to destroy his lord because of envy for the good things that fell to the lord's lot, but how the lord dissuaded him by inviting him to sample the lord's life—when the hind discovered that for every trouble he knew the lord had another.

The monks heard it out in silence and applauded by a gentle clapping of hands.

"Come hither, sir jongleur," said the prior kindly. "You are over-young to be skilled at your craft. How got you such learning?"

"Nay, lord, I am by rights no jongleur yet, but only a poor youth, homeless, landless and friendless. I sing that I may earn my lodging and somewhat to keep me and my follower on the way."

"Do you say sooth? Where learned you this lay?"

"Truly, lord, I made it as I rode hither through the day," returned Matteo as modestly as a young man may who is really bursting with pride.

"Then 'tis manifest God hath selected you to be one of those whose part it shall be to lighten the sorrows of your fellows," said the prior. "Heed well the responsibility thus placed upon you, for many jongleurs and trouveres are light-minded knaves, seeking only to raise up the evil that is in all men, scorners of Christ and panderers of wickedness."

Matteo bowed his head, and took the words to heart, surprized at their moderation, as at the greeting he had received; for the generality of the priesthood were bitterly hostile to the jongleurs, as representing the budding free-thought of the age.

"How may we reward you for the diversion you have given us?" continued the prior. "And I would call the attention of all of you, my brethren," he added, turning to the assembled monks, "that the lay this youth hath sung is as feat a sermon as may come to you any Lententide. Hold it in your memories, all you who contend that the larger carp and the elder wine go to the prior's lodge."

The monks all bobbed their heads, but nobody answered him.

"But your boon, young sir?" demanded the prior. "Name it."

Matteo hesitated.

"If I ask not too much," he began.

"Nay, how shall we know if you do not ask it?" the prior caught him up.

"Then do you embolden me, holy sir. As you have seen, I have no gittern with which to practise my jongleurie. I am poor. All that my father had, the Saracens have destroyed. I must earn my way to the court of Antioch where dwelleth a friend of his who may advance me in my craft. Prithee, Lord Prior, if I ask not too much, grant me this gittern I hold in my hand."

"A fair request," said the prior. "How better may we dispense God's bounty than by placing it in the power of such as are worthy to improve themselves by the use of hand and brain? Take the gittern, youth. May it bring you fortune and success."

CHAPTER VIII

THE VOYAGE TO TRIPOLI

FROM Belvoir they rode by way of Nazareth and the Fountain of Sapphora to the great seaport of Acre, the largesse of castle hall and guest house adding to the slender hoard in Matteo's wallet. In Acre they put their horses at the Inn of the Blessed Loaf near the Fondaco of the Pisans in the Inner City, and sallied straightway to the wharves in search of passage on one of the galleys or busses preparing to sail up the coast, for the journey northward by land would have been prohibitively expensive as well as very dangerous.

But they soon learned that the Latin traders who had the monopoly of the shipping and merchantry of Outremer were not slow to take advantage of the needs of travelers like themselves. The Patrono of the first vessel they boarded, a Venetian busse, demanded ten bezants for carrying them to Antioch.

"But 'tis as worth while to ask me for the beard of the soldan of Babylon," protested Matteo. "Bethink you, messer, we are poor folk and despoiled by the Saracens. How may we——"

"Then tell your troubles otherwhere," interrupted the Italian bruskly. "I voyage for my profit, youth, and not to supply charity to beardless, begging knaves."

"A pox on you!" shouted Matteo, and tugged at his sword-hilt, but Ali seized him by the arm.

"Have a care, Messer Matteo!" beseeched the old Turcople. "The scoundrel hath a score of his mariners within call. If we brawl with them, they will lay us by the heels and turn us over to their viscount for punishment. They are ill folk to fall out with, and the king lets them have their own way, forasmuch as their trade is vital to the kingdom."

So, with his tongue between his teeth, Matteo returned ashore, and tried his luck at the next wharf, where lay a mighty Genoese dromond, with high, bulging, thickly timbered sides, and masts like trees towering above the bulwarks. Here they were treated with still less consideration.

"I put not to sea with those I do not know," the comito, or second in command, told them curtly. "We have over-much trouble with the pirates. Return with a passport from the count of the city or a burgess of repute to vouch for you, and we will talk business."

"We can not pay much," warned Matteo.

"Then return not at all," advised the comito with a grin. "We are plagued with rich pilgrims and Greek merchants who will pay any price for a comfortable voyage in so vast a ship."

On the wharf Matteo sat down disconsolately upon a stone mooring-bitt.

"So far we have come with tolerable ease, Ali," he said. "But now it appears our troubles begin. How if I sold this ring the Assassin gave me?"

He twitched from his finger the heavy silver circlet with the emblem of the triple-bladed dagger held in a clinched fist.

"Nay, nay, Messer Matteo," cried Ali in dismay. "Whatever else you do, part not with that!"

"Wherefore?" demanded Matteo, holding it up to the light to study the workings.

"For that it would be ill luck, and if Sinan heard of it—as hear he must—his anger against you would be unappeased until you were slain."

"You exaggerate, old wolf," laughed Matteo. "Why should so great a person care for one so humble as I or what I do? Also, he did not give me the ring. 'Twas——"

"Whoever gave you the ring was high in Sinan's counsels," declared Ali. "Nay, lord, be advised. Some day you will be glad of that signet. It may smooth your way when 'tis rougher than today."

" 'Tis not likely," derided Matteo. "Ah, well, we will stop in the church this side of the inn and burn a candle to my patron. Mayhap, he will grant us a dispensation."

"Good luck will come for that you hold by the ring," said Ali. "But 'twill do no harm to burn the candle."

They paid a silver penny to the priest, saw the candle alight, muttered their prayers and returned to the inn. An old knight of the Hospital was seated by the door of the common room, and he hailed them as they entered.

" 'Tis told me you are from beyond Jordan, young sir," he said courteously. "I am fresh landed from an embassy to the king of Sicily. Prithee, what news do you bring from the marches?"

He ordered wine, and motioned for the Turcople to sit with them, listening to Matteo's story with no interruption other than an occasional interjection of sympathy.

"Your father was a good knight," he said at the end. " 'Twas my fortune to ride with him in a bicker of the southern march some years gone. I grieve for his death. As for you, young sir, you have a far journey to Antioch. 'Tis an hundred leagues or more. Have you ample funds?"

Matteo recounted their experiences by the water-side.

"Ha, yes, the Italians are close-fisted folk. How much have you between the twain of you?"

Matteo emptied his wallet on the table.

"Here are two bezants and some silver and copper," he said. "And you, Ali?"

The old Turcople dug a meager handful of coins from his waist-pouch. One bezant glinted yellow amid much copper.

"So much I had on me when I woke for the scream of old Gaspard as the paynims cut his throat," he grunted.

"But 'tis scarce enough—for Antioch," said the Hospitaler, shaking his head.

"Ha, thanks to St. Matteo, my name-saint, I see a way!" exclaimed Matteo. "I remember, now, my father spoke to me of a Genoese, one Messer Gambaglio of Tripoli, who had charge of his moneys. We will go to him first."

The Hospitaler stroked his beard reflectively.

"That would be best," he agreed. "And a new thought comes to me, Messer Matteo. I will accompany you to the Fondaco of the Pisans where I am known, and we will purchase a passage for you at the rate they charge their own people—which is very different from that the patrono would quote you if you went to him direct."

The viscount of the Pisans gave them a hearty welcome, and lent an attentive ear to the urgings of the Hospitaler in their behalf.

"Why," said he, " 'tis not our custom to abate the rates of travel lawfully established, but if the youth and his servant will agree to lend assistance to the patrono if he is attacked by pirates, such as are become a menace on the coast, I will give them passage for two bezants in the *Sancta Spiritu* galley sailing at sunrise tomorrow."

"Certes, that is a fair offer," answered Matteo.

"And you will furnish provender for yourselves," added the Pisan hastily. "Ah, Holy Virgin, how prices do increase!"

Matteo would have objected to this last reservation, but the Hospitaler made a sign for him to assent, and after they had left the Fondaco said:

" 'Twas as good a bargain as you might expect. The Italian merchants thrive on our needs because there is none to compete with them. Then, too, they are independent, and had you offered objection to his terms the viscount might well have told you to look otherwhere for accommodation."

Matteo thanked the old knight for his kindness, and toward evening he and Ali rode down to the port and embarked upon the *Sancta Spiritu.* They were in the act of leading their horses on board when the patrono came up.

"How, now?" he demanded. "Was there aught mentioned of two steeds to take up cargo-room in the bargain betwixt you and the magnificent viscount?"

"Why, no," admitted Matteo.

"Then keep them ashore, young sir."

"But, worshipful Messer Patrono, horses are not easy to come by in this land, as you know——"

The patrono turned his back.

"I have said what I have said," he announced.

Ali nudged his young master.

"He hath the right of it, Messer Matteo. Ask him for terms."

"The oversight was mine," began Matteo again. "We may not leave our horses behind, Messer Patrono. Prithee, name a price—and remember we are not lords of the court."

"Four bezants, and not a denarius less."

"I have only one bezant left," objected Matteo. "And we have to buy food for the voyage."

"Three bezants, then."

"Why not say thirty?" asked Matteo sarcastically.

"Three, I said, and not a ——"

Matteo set his jaw, and started to lead his horse back up the gangplank.

"May the curses of the holy saints descend upon the head of one so hard hearted to a fellow Christian in distress!" he barked over his shoulder. "Well will it serve you, fellow, if the pirates——"

"Hold, hold!" cried the Pisan, making the sign of the cross. "No curses, good youth! No curses, I prithee! 'Tis bad luck sufficient to have to counter the common perils of a voyage in these parlous times without wishing more upon us."

"Is that all you would say?" asked Matteo, halting.

"Nay, have your own way—if you are in earnest you have no more than a bezant?"

" 'Tis what I told you, and I am not a Pisan."

"Eh, but you are a tenacious lad," sighed the patrono. "Well, you shall bring your horses aboard for one bezant, and for your sake I hope your curse was stopped in time. These pirates are worse than Saracen raiders of the desert."

"So be it," said Matteo, "two bezants for us and one for the horses——"

"That take up fifty bezants' worth of cargo-room!"

"—and we thank you, fair sir, for your generous kindness to two poor victims of paynim wrath."

The patrono shrugged his shoulders.

"Words are words, messer. They will not buy me new ropes or wine. Your troubles are your troubles, and mine are mine."

With which he left them, and after making their horses as comfortable as possible beween decks in the deep waist of the galley, they sought the sheltered half-cabin under the poop, and rolled themselves up in their cloaks to sleep.

An hour before the dawn they were awakened by the shouts of the shipmen, the clatter of oars and the tumult of the sails and cordage, as the *Sancta Spiritu* pulled out of the harbor, and made sail, keeping as close inshore as the conformation of the land permitted.

Matteo and Ali for want of definite occupation, amused themselves by inspecting their floating home and their fellow-passengers.

THE *Sancta Spiritu* was about one hundred and thirty feet long and twenty-five feet in the beam at the broadest point amidships. She had one sturdy mast forward of amidships to which was rigged an immense square sail adorned with a fanciful picture designed to represent the Holy Spirit standing on a cloud. At bow and stern her squat hull was built up into massive cabins or block-houses capable of being cut off from the adjacent decks. Bulwarks, shoulder high, guarded the waist-deck, which was lined on either side with the benches of the galeotti, heavy-thewed Italians and Slavonians from the Dalmatic shore.

Beneath this deck stretched the wide interior of the hull, floored with the sand and gravel of the ballast, piled with cargo, water-casks, bales and chests. To one side half a dozen horses were huddled in a narrow pen. Beyond them several sheep and a bull tottered with the uneasy motion of the ship. Chickens squawked in coops. Men and women huddled about tiny braziers, cooking food or sleeping. Children wailed. A dense, fetid smell overlaid everything.

"Phaugh!" gasped Matteo, when they had made the tour from end to end between decks. "This place is enough to give one the plague. Let us try the fresh air above."

On the upper deck they encountered passengers of their own degree, pilgrims and merchants, several of whom had the honor of sharing the patrono's cabin in the poop. There were priests, monks and burgesses and three bearded Greeks with haughty, weak faces.

"Not a man-at-arms in the lot," commented Ali, as he climbed after his master up the ladder to the poop, where two shipmen handled the cranky rudder which kicked in the heaving swell. "No wonder the Pisan was so anxious to have two used to mail aboard her!"

"But the galeotti have the look of being men of their hands," said Matteo, pointing to the hairy-chested fellows who hauled at the ropes of the sail so that full advantage might be taken of the shifting wind.

"Aye, belike," agreed Ali doubtfully. "I know nothing of warfare on the sea, lord, but it seems to me this craft is ill-fitted for fighting. She is slow and clumsy, and there is much space to be defended."

"Why worry?" adjured Matteo cheerfully. "Belike we shall come to our journey's end with never a chance to draw blade from sheath."

Indeed, the *Sancta Spiritu* made slow time, save when another vessel loomed on the horizon, and the galeotti flocked to the oars, no matter how potently favorable might be the wind. Yet they sailed without undue adventure throughout that day, and the following morning put into Tyre, where they tarried twenty-four hours, loading and unloading cargo.

Leaving Tyre, they pointed up the coast for Beyrout, but head winds baffled them, and though the galeotti fought with the bucking oars they might scarcely keep headway against the gale. Great was the agony of the passengers, and Matteo found cause for thanksgiving that he was miraculously immune from the nausea of the sea which made an inferno of between decks and the cabins. As for Ali, he hung with his head over the rail for a day, and then mastered the affliction.

The moderating of the tempest inspired hope in even the most forlorn of the company, but on the third day, as they were beating northward slowly under half-manned oars, a stranger galley sped out from a cove of the coast on their right hand. Instantly, all was bustle and confusion. The galeotti off watch were aroused and tumbled up to the oars. Messengers were sent to summon the patrono and the comito. The four mariners, who were called balestrieri, the armorers of the crew, broke out the stores of bows, cross-bows, swords, bills and axes from the hold beneath the patrono's cabin. A sorry wailing rose from the frightened passengers.

Matteo and Ali made their way at once to the poop, and accosted the patrono as he took his stand beside the helmsmen.

"Are you certain, in truth, this is a pirate galley?" cried Matteo.

"Alack, good sir, and what else might it be which cometh so stealthily and at such speed? Would honest merchantmen labor so at their oars to overtake one of their own kind?"

"Be of stout heart," advised Matteo. "We are a numerous company. We shall make a strong resistance."

"We are many, but I can trust none of the passengers," returned the captain despondently. "Saving yourselves and the galeotti, we are without fighting men."

"Then let us arm them! Come Ali, you draw a sure bow. How if we make trial at the helmsman of the pirates?"

"Right gladly, lord," answered Ali, his keen eyes blazing with the battle lust, his lean face sharpened into a wolfish grimace. "But if you will take my counsel, we must devise some strategy or trick whereby we may offset superior numbers."

"Is it so bad?"

"Aye, in sooth. If once the pirates come aboard us, how may we support their attack? Rather, let us work to bemaze them in a manner unforeseen."

"Good counsel," admitted Matteo, "but 'tis deeds, not counsel, we require."

"Bide, lord, bide."

Ali had selected a bow from a pile of weapons at his feet, set arrow to string and drew it tentatively to the barbs, aiming up at the mast head.

"Ha, Messer Patrono," he called over his shoulder, "hast a strong pole athwart the mast yon—that which the sail doth hang from?"

"Aye, 'tis strong," replied the patrono in some bewilderment.

"Would it hold up a great weight?"

"What mean you?"

"Why, even what I say. A weight of many men, a hogshead, let us say, laden with ballast."

"Mayhap."

"Then heed my advice. Let us take a hogshead or a water-butt, fill it with rocks and gravel, swing it from the crossyard and at the right minute drop it in the pirate's waist. Belike 'twill sink him."

"A good thought," approved Matteo.

"It may be," said the patrono doubtfully. "Aye, it may be. 'Tis worth trying."

He sent a squad of shipmen to fill the butt and sling it into place by means of a pulley rigged to the end of the crossyard. Then they rove other ropes to the opposite end of the yard, ready to pull taut and counterbalance the weight which should be imposed upon it when the butt was hoisted into place. And meantime the pirate galley was foaming up on the starboard quarter, her decks crammed with men in armor, a huge bloody hand distended across the shining surface of her single sail.

"A rare fight 'twill be, Ali," quoth Matteo with contentment, flexing his bow. "How is the range?"

"Over-far, lord—and the wind against us. Aye, you shall find cause for a new romaunt in the next hour's time."

From the waist of the *Sancta Spiritu* echoed the screaming of women in mortal fear, as the passengers lamented their danger, some prostrate on the deck, others burrowing in the ballast like animals seeking to hide, or running back and forth, striking at one another and knocking their heads against the deck-beams.

CHAPTER IX

THE RING OF SINAN

FOAM spurted over the beak of the pirate galley. Forty oars a side churned the water white. With a prolonged whine, a catapult on the forecastle jerked up its casting-arm to sling a great stone that hurtled through the air and dropped into the sea beyond the *Sancta Spiritu*. A cloud of arrows followed, the whistling of their shafts ending in the drumming thud of points driven into the deck-planks. One of the galeotti flung up his arms and crashed down, drilled through the chest.

"Ho, that is a game that we can play!" cried Ali. "And if we lack a catapult mayhap we have what will do as well."

He loosed his bow, and the arrow flashed across the narrowing belt of water, sped between the wall of shields around the helmsmen and found its mark. There was a moment's confusion, but the galley never faltered in her course.

"My turn!" exclaimed Matteo.

His arrow, too, passed the shield-wall, and a second man dropped. The galeotti raised a cheer, while a score or so loosed a ragged volley. Matteo and Ali notched arrows as fast as they could draw, and every shaft told on the pirate's crowded decks; but nothing could check her headlong speed, and the unending storm of her answering shafts chased the scantily armored galeotti to cover beneath the bulwarks. With a hoarse racket of shouts and imprecations the long, slender craft ranged alongside and closed with her prey, to an accompaniment of clattering oars and creaking cordage.

Grappling-irons clutched the bulwarks of the *Sancta Spiritu;* brawny pirates, with only hauberks to cover their nakedness, lashed ropes to the rigging of the mast. A horde of mail-clad figures scrambled up the side of the merchantman and cut and thrust at the thin line of the galeotti.

"St. Bacchus!" apostrophized Ali with uncommon piety—for him. "You spoke of a rare fight, Messer Matteo. 'Tis more likely to be a rare slaughter unless this device of mine doth as I hope. Let us try it."

He ran to the rope which held the dangling water-butt and its load of stones and gravel. It was knotted in a sailor's slip-noose to an iron ring in the deck. High overhead the water-butt swung as the ships swayed on the rocking waves. It moved in a restricted arc like a gigantic pendulum whose mechanism was running down.

"I have it," shouted Matteo to make himself heard above the din of the fighting and the uproar of the frightened passengers below decks. "Here!" He seized one of the two helmsmen and motioned to the man to grasp the rope beside him. They hauled together on the rope, adding their strength to the movement imparted by the natural motion of the vessel, and the arc of the water butt was increased. It swung farther and farther in each direction, sometimes over the deck of the *Sancta Spiritu*, sometimes over the pirate galley.

The pirates themselves perceived the maneuver, and the bowmen who still clustered thickly on poop and forecastle discharged a buzzing swarm of arrows against the three at the rope's end. Matteo's mail of proof turned the shafts, but the galeotti beside him sank with four arrows in shoulder, arm and thigh.

"Quick, Ali!" called Matteo. "Cut the rope when next the cask is poised over the pirate. They may slay us if you pause."

Ali made no answer, but stood silent with sword raised above the tautened rope, his eyes glued on the spinning water-butt. The ungainly contrivance swung in over the deck of the *Sancta Spiritu*, already invaded forward of the mast. Then, ever so slowly, it seemed, it swung out again. Yells of fear came from the pirates, threats and execrations. Their archers labored anew, and the kite-shaped shield which the old Turcople upheld with his left arm rang under the battering shafts. But he refused to budge. His sword was poised, ready.

Out, out, swung the cask. It was fair over the pirates' deck. Swish! The sword came down. The rope parted. The water-butt heaved ponderously, and dropped. But at that moment a puff of wind caught the two vessels, the *Sancta Spiritu* lurched against the slighter hull of the pirate—and the missile of Ali's devising smashed squarely on the merchantmen's massive bulwarks.

There was a shattering of timbers, a scattering of stones and gravel, and a group of pirates and galeotti were smeared across the decks. Then the two vessels ground together again, and the yelling pirates poured with renewed confidence through the gap in the bulwarks.

"St. Matthew! What a mischance!" cried Matteo.

"Ah, blessed saints, was ever the like before!" groaned the patrono.

Ali shook his sword in air, and gave vent to a flood of wholly impious blasphemy—in errant moments he forgot his surface veneer of Christianity and became the Semitic pagan he was born.

"The fat is in the fire," he growled. "Well, Messer Matteo, we shall be meeting your father and mother sooner than we expected. Let us make a good end."

But Matteo laughed with a cheerfulness that sprang unbidden in his breast.

"Nay, old wolf," he answered. "There are blows yet to be struck, and who knows what may happen. These galeotti are stout people, but they need leaders. Follow on."

"There spoke Messer Gui," chuckled Ali. "I follow, lordling."

Matteo leaped down the ladder stairs with a single bound, the old Turcople at his heels.

"Rally to the poop, Christians all!" he shouted. "Back! Back, I say!"

The galeotti heard him, and abandoned the unequal fight along the line of the bulwarks, a fight in which they were already worsted. They retreated aft, fighting as they came, and Matteo and Ali took their places in the front rank.

"Ho, there, Beardless One!" shouted the

leader of the pirates, a giant in gaudy, silvered mail, with a crimson surcoat and a plumed Grecian helmet. "You call for Christians to the poop. We are as good Christians as you."

And his followers all howled with glee as he plunged aft to attack Matteo.

"God help Christendom, if such as you be Christians," retorted Matteo, parrying the Greek's mace. "Stand firm, men! A steady line now athwart the deck."

The galeotti took heart from the example of Matteo and Ali and the lightening of their task, once each flank was protected by the bulwarks. Their position put to disadvantage the superior numbers of their assailants, and for a moment the fight swayed forward away from the poop, as the pirates gave ground. But fresh hordes of the riff-raff of the coast scrambled aboard to their comrades' aid, and soon the galeotti had their backs to the bulkhead of the great cabin, fighting bitterly to maintain an unbroken front.

The captain of the pirates never abated his attack on Matteo. His splendid armor turned the shrewdest stroke; his powerful arm rained unending blows. But Matteo dodged when he could not parry, and contrived to hold his ground. A sudden shift in the struggling groups brought them to close quarters.

The Greek dropped his mace, which hung by a chain from his mailed wrist, wrapped his arms around Matteo and hurled him to the deck. Matteo let his own sword go, but snatched out his dagger, writhed in his adversary's grip, taking advantage of the man's heavier armor, and twisted on top. He dashed his left hand into the fellow's face to blind him, then poked with dagger-point to find a hole between helm and hauberk to cut his throat.

But the pirate gave a convulsive wriggle of surprize that completely unseated Matteo.

"Hold, lord, hold!" he panted. "I saw the Sign! Wherefore did you not tell me? I am your dog, lord! Let me rise! I will call off my men."

Matteo hesitated, lifted his dagger again to strike.

"Nay, nay," the pirate begged. "The ring! The ring!"

Before Matteo could drive the blow home, he was seized by a dozen of the pirates and hurled to one side. Expecting to be finished in the next breath, he was amazed to hear the voice of his late adversary commanding his release.

"Back! Back, brothers!" bellowed the pirate captain. "Down arms! Overside!"

They hesitated to obey him, and he waded into them with his mace a-swing.

"Did I not give an order?" he snarled.

"But the galley is ours," protested the bolder of his followers.

"'Tis not for us! Give over, I say! Down arms! Overside! The Bloody Hand will fall on any who resist."

And like a pack of beaten dogs, the victorious pirates huddled before him to the rail, and dropped to their own deck. Their captain watched them go; then turned to Matteo.

"I am sorry, lord," he said humbly. "Certes, you should have given me the sign. I would never——"

"How should I know you were subject to it?" demanded Matteo curtly.

The Greek regarded him in astonishment. "Does not the Old One——"

"What the Old One does is no concern of yours," answered Matteo. "You have done harm enough. Go!"

"But you will give good report of me?" the fellow pleaded, his swagger all gone. "I meant no harm."

"That is to be seen. Go!"

He went. At his orders, the lashings were cut, the grapplings cast off. The pirate galley drew away. Like a giant centipede it crept over the sun-speckled waters, its sinister sign of the Bloody Hand looming in monstrous threat until it was beyond eyesight.

"How, now, lordling," demanded Ali, "was it not good counsel when I bade you keep the ring?"

"I know not," replied Matteo, his eyes fastened upon the dwindling hull of the pirate. "Mayhap 'twas the candle I burned to my name-saint."

"What name-saint would have worked a change in a pirate's heart?" returned Ali practically. "Moreover he spoke of the ring."

"Aye, but by what chance was he brought to see the ring?" countered Matteo. "Be not too sure, old wolf."

"Humph," grunted Ali, wolf-like, "I am sure that ring is a useful tool with his kind—and they are over-plentiful in this world, as, belike, in the next. Guard it well, lord."

The patrono and his officers were equally curious to know what had driven their foes overboard when the galley was as good as lost.

"I ask no man to speak against himself," said the patrono delicately, "but certes, fair sir, have you any bargain, under favor of magic, white or black, by which you can summon the powers of the air?"

"Nay, worthy sir," replied Matteo. "I had the knave down, and with my dagger at his throat he yielded. Afterward he was honest enough to stand by his bargain."

"But somewhat was said of a sign."

"Who says so?"

"One of the galeotti——"

"Imagination, magnificent sir."

"Yet," persisted the patrono, "the fellow seemed to owe deference to you. As I said, I mean no intrusion, messer, but you are a stout warrior, for all your few years, and if you exert an influence over the pirates of these seas, I may make it worth your while to lend assistance to the merchants of my nation."

"You sing a different tune than that you held when you would have denied me passage for the matter of a bezant or two," jeered Matteo. "Let be, I prithee. The knave owed a debt to one I know, and when he saw who I was, he was anxious to pay it. By chance, then, you profited."

"And so shall you," returned the Pisan doggedly. "For I will even rebate you the sum of your passage."

"Your generosity, magnificent sir, overwhelms me," said Matteo, bowing low.

But Ali, the wary, jogged his arm.

"Give over, lordling," rumbled the old Turcople in a thunderous whisper. "The shipman means no harm, and the bezants may come in handy."

So Matteo added:

"Indeed, Messer Patrono, I shall not deny the merit of your reward, and for the lenity of yon monster, it was more than I had ever expected. I comprehend it no more than you. But, certes, it could not have been achieved by black magic, for e'er sailing I burned a candle to my patron beseeching that he smooth the path ahead of me, and if merit belongs to any, it belongs to him."

"Ha, so!" exclaimed the Pisan. "That explains it. An offering to a good saint in the right moment may do much. In that case, messer, I will even withdraw my offer of reward and expend the money in a special mass of thanksgiving for all on board the instant I set foot ashore in Tripoli."

"Spoken like an Italian money-lender!" hissed Ali, with hand on his sword-hilt.

But Matteo laughed aloud, and this time it was he who exerted restraint.

"Nay, nay, old wolf, we are the victims of our own modesty. And why should we begrudge contributing to a mass for the worthy patrono's benefit?"

" 'Twill be for your own benefit as much as other bodies," snapped the patrono. "And if you fought bravely, you were given passage at the less rate for no other purpose. You but earned your way."

"Aye, so," agreed Matteo. "And now, we will eat and drink—and hark to me, magnificent signor, we eat and drink at your expense henceforth. Dost understand?"

There was a sharp edge to his voice.

"Oh, aye," said the patrono uneasily. "I am a reasonable man. Eat as you will."

"That will we," asserted Ali, "and drink, too."

And like a resourceful man-at-arms he immediately sought out the patrono's private wine-cask.

"Having broached one cask, I am of a mind to try a second," he observed with a wink to his master.

But Matteo refused to join his libations.

"We came out of that coil with ease unbefitting our deserts," remarked Matteo thoughtfully. "Belike we shall have trouble with Messer Gambaglio in Tripoli. Aye, after a fair day, look for storm."

"On a fair won field think not on defeat," countered Ali, quaffing a second cup. "Messer Gambaglio will be swift to aid your father's son."

But Matteo did not answer him. He took the ring of Sinan from his finger, stared at it idly and slipped it in his pouch.

" 'Tis potent for good or ill," he muttered to himself. "If a pirate honors it, no less would a Templar cut down its possessor. Best hide it for a while."

CHAPTER X

MESSER GAMBAGLIO, THE GENOESE

THE *Sancta Spiritu* entered the harbor of Tripoli on the afternoon of the eighth day after quitting Acre. Matteo and Ali went ashore so soon as their horses could be put overside. The patrono remained in his cabin until they had gone, evidently fearful that they might renew their demands for rebate of their passage money. But the two travelers already had dismissed him from their minds. They were considering the problems of the future, and they left the Pisan galley without a thought to their recent adventure or whatever their fellow passengers might think of it.

On the wharf they asked the first burgher they met for the house of Messer Gambaglio.

" 'Tis in the Street of the Genoese under the Castle Hill," he replied. "You may know it by the sign of the Golden Galley hanging above the door."

Matteo thanked the man, and mounting their horses, he and Ali rode at a foot-pace along the narrow, stone-paved streets of the town, teeming with artisans, burghers, country-folk, priests, merchants from overseas and the men-at-arms and knights of Count Raymond, whose castle loomed over all on the heights of Mount Pilgrim, where a new city was growing up distinct from the ancient town on the peninsula adjoining the little river.

"A rich city," said Matteo.

"Aye, lord, as rich as any," agreed Ali.

They found the Street of the Genoese without difficulty, and midway of its length a replica of a galley in gilded wood creaked in the evening breeze above the door of a substantial house whose thick-walled windows were barred with iron. A servant was about to shut the great door as Matteo dismounted.

"What want you, my master?" he asked in sniffling French with an Italian accent.

"Speech with Messer Gambaglio."

"The signor is engaged."

"Say to him, then, that Messer Matteo, the son of the lord of Nerak, is waiting at his door," directed Matteo with a touch of hauteur.

The servant opened the door and bowed very low.

"Ah, lord, forgive this ignorant one. Pray, enter. I will fetch the signor at once."

Matteo handed his bridle to Ali, and followed the Italian inside the low vestibule, which opened on one side into Messer Gambaglio's counting-room and warehouse and terminated in a flight of stairs leading to the living quarters above. Presently, there was a swish of garments on the stairs, and Messer Gambaglio appeared, a grim-featured man, with watchful eyes and a tight mouth, clad in a fur-trimmed gaberdine.

"Ha, Messer Matteo, I greet you well!" he hailed. "You carry a message from your noble father?"

A choking sensation in Matteo's throat brought the tears to his eyes. The buoyance of youth and the swift succession of events had blurred his recollections of that last awful night in Nerak. But memory was easily stirred. He saw again the swirl of fierce Arab faces, the sea of dirty white surcoats, the two who stood alone in the great hall, so dauntless in the face of doom.

"My father is dead, Messer Gambaglio," he said brokenly.

"Dead! Lord Gui is dead!" Consternation struggled with amazement in the mask-like countenance of the Genoese. "Why, he was in health the last time I heard from him some two weeks since."

"Aye, but the Saracens carried Nerak by storm. Of all the castle company, only I and Ali Ma'akwaa, the captain of the Turcoples, escaped. Ali is without."

"Nerak captured! And by storm!" A doubtful expression crossed Messer Gambaglio's face. "Certes, 'twas the strongest hold on the eastern march, after Kerak! 'Tis——"

"It was taken by treachery," explained Matteo.

The doubtful expression became intensified on Messer Gambaglio's face.

"A strange tale," he remarked, wagging his head. "You bring me some message from your father, Messer Matteo?"

"How could I?" replied Matteo sadly. "He died, sword in hand, with only time to call to Ali to help my escape."

"No message? Humph! Ho! Humph! A token, then? Somewhat——"

"I fled in the night, Messer Gambaglio. The castle was already full of Saracens. We ran for our lives. There was no opportunity for tokens."

Messer Gambaglio wagged his head again. The doubtful look became openly suspicious.

"At the least, young sir, you have some one here in Tripoli who can identify you, some friend of your father's who knoweth you by sight—as I do not?"

"I am just landed from the *Sancta Spiritu* galley, new-come from Acre. Nay, there is none here I may call upon."

Messer Gambaglio gathered his velvet

gown around him. The deference had leaked out of his voice.

"A strange tale," he repeated. "You come here, unknown to me, reciting the death of a great lord, whose castle hath been deemed impregnable, and claiming to be his son. Yet you have naught to prove your identity or the truth of your story. You ask too much, young sir!"

Matteo flushed to the eyes.

"You doubt my word?" he asked, his voice level and hard.

Messer Gambaglio shrugged his lean shoulders.

"Doubt? 'Tis an ugly word. Say, rather I ask some word, some token——"

"The night before my father died he spoke to me of you, and planned to send me hither."

"No doubt, no doubt. But proof, Messer Matteo, proof."

"Proof you shall have in plenty, if you will but bide your time. I am on my way to Antioch, where my father's old friend, John the Englishman——"

"Aye, Messer John I know by repute."

"Will you take his word?"

"Gladly, or that of any other lord or merchant known to me. Do you continue on your journey, and on your return bring Messer John with you."

"But how shall I continue on my journey when my follower and I have not one bezant between us?" asked Matteo candidly.

Messer Gambaglio permitted a hostile light to shine in his eyes.

"Money!" he snorted. "I thought 'twas that!"

"And what else?" demanded Matteo indignantly. "Are you not custodian of my father's moneys?"

"Aye, and as custodian I am not permitted to yield them up to any youth who approaches me with a smooth story," retorted Messer Gambaglio.

"Why, that is true," conceded Matteo, striving to be reasonable. "Yet see you——"

The Genoese made a gesture which was politely indicative of his distaste for further conversation.

"It grieves me that we are unable to come to an understanding, young sir," he said suavely. "Prithee, think over the matter, and mayhap by morning you will have recollected some one of your acquaintance in the town who may make us known to each other. Ho, Giacomo, show the signor out."

Matteo was at a loss for words. He felt baffled, appalled by this unforeseen stumbling-block. Messer Gambaglio bowed to him and retired up the stairs. Giacomo suggestively clicked the handle of the door-lock.

"By ——!" swore Matteo impotently, and stalked forth.

The door banged shut behind him. Ali leaned down eagerly from his saddle, trying to see his master's face through the twilight.

"What luck, lord?" he cried.

"The worst of ill luck," gritted Matteo between clenched teeth. "The merchant misdoubts my word."

"What? He called you a liar?"

"Aye, you might say so."

Ali started to swing down from his horse.

"Let us go within and slay him," he suggested calmly. "I think there is a way."

Matteo laughed.

"Not so, old wolf. Count Raymond would lay us by the heels for common malefactors did we commit murder in his town. Let us, instead, seek out the best inn, brazen a night's lodging and await what fortune may bring."

" 'Tis worth trying," admitted Ali. "And the merchant, doubtless, will be here some days longer. Perchance we may yet set upon him and carry off his moneys which, after all, are your moneys."

"You are not on the desert march, Ali," chuckled Matteo as they clattered through the streets, wayfarers dodging in front of them. "In these towns only the lord of the castle may rob."

"And for that matter, only the lord of the castle may rob on the desert march," returned Ali. "But look you, Messer Matteo, how will this inn do for our pilfering?"

He pointed to a large stone building, set in a courtyard, back from the street, before which hung a signboard daubed with a figure whose gilded halo gleamed in the light of a tall torch stuck in a sconce of the gateway.

"It hath the right appearance," approved Matteo, guiding his horse between the gateposts. "Ho, there, varlets," he summoned a brace of serving-knaves, "bait these horses becomingly. Where is your master?"

"At your pleasure, lordling, at your pleasure," piped up a shrill voice, and an apple-red face showed by the doorway. "Come within, I prithee."

"Nay," objected Matteo as they were

ushered into a room where a number of merchants and pilgrims sat at supper, "we will have private quarters, Messer Taverner, and the best food your kitchen can supply. Haste!"

The inn-keeper eyed them a trifle dubiously, now that the strong light indoors showed up their threadbare raiment and rusted mail. He rubbed his hands together.

"At once, at once, if it pleases you," he mumbled. "But first there is——"

"St. Barnabas be my champion! Is this the way to accost soldiers of the Holy Sepulcher?" roared Ali, striding to the front. "Must my lord ask twice? Nay, I will usher him, myself, if you in this place have no manners."

He bowed before Matteo gravely.

"This way, lord, prithee, follow me," he urged. "Later, I will take pains to drill reverence into these knaves. I am overcome, lord, that——"

The inn-keeper wrung his hands.

"Oh, be not so out of temper, lord, I pray!" he begged. "All shall be as you desire. Indeed, I have never before this had the pleasure of serving your magnificence. But you shall have everything you desire. A chamber is being prepared. If you will——"

* * *

AN HOUR later Matteo and Ali reclined at their ease in a spacious upper room with a well-spread board before them. They ate and drank like men who had been days at sea on sea rations, like men who had begun to believe they might not eat heartily again.

"This is better than the patrono's sour wine," gurgled Ali.

"And this capon is tastier than his stringy goat meat," answered Matteo with his mouth full.

"A day of such fare," continued Ali reflectively, "and you will not be chary of setting upon that churlish merchant, lord."

A knock sounded on the door. Matteo caught up his sword and laid it across his knee. Ali did likewise.

"Mayhap we are now to be set upon, ourselves," quoth Matteo. "Come in."

The door opened, and Messer Gambaglio entered. The Genoese looked over his shoulder, peered about the room to make sure they were alone, shut the door cautiously and sped to Matteo's side.

"Why did you not tell me, lord?" he stammered, sinking to his knees. "Was it a test?"

"A test?" repeated Matteo, puzzled. "What test?"

"Nay, lord, you may trust me. A merchant who was on board the Pisan galley with you hath told me how Maimonades of the Bloody Hand gave ground before your boy's face. The merchant marveled at it, lord, for he did not know, as you and I know, that Maimonades is a servant of the sign."

"What sign?" demanded Matteo.

Then he bethought himself, and fumbled in his pouch for the Assassin's ring. He held it out, and Messer Gambaglio crouched forward with a shiver and pressed the beryl to his forehead.

"You did not need to test me, lord," he wailed. "I am as faithful as any who serve Sinan. Why did you not show it to me at once?"

Ali lay back in his seat goggling with open eyes at the amazing spectacle of an elderly hard-faced merchant, richly garbed, bowing down in worship before a tarnished silver ring. Matteo controled his surprize. After the adventure with the pirate he was prepared for anything.

"I did not think it necessary," he answered. "So you know the signet of the Old Man of the Mountain?"

"I am of the circle of his agents," returned the merchant in a low voice.

"Was the pirate captain—Maimonades, you called him—also?"

"Surely, lord."

"Do you know a man named Kafur?"

"Aye, lord. He passed this way a few weeks since. Now, I think of it, he had a mission close by Nerak."

"I met him," answered Matteo.

"If I had but known this!" exclaimed the Genoese, wringing his hands. "Had you but told me in the first place you could have had whatever you sought."

"Even to the moneys of my father?"

"Certes, lordling," answered Messer Gambaglio in open amazement. "Why not? But prithee tell me: Is he in sooth your father?"

Matteo smiled. Here was an amazing contradiction. But a moment since this man had refused to give up to him what he had claimed was rightfully his. Now, simply because he wore a certain ring, he could have whatever he claimed.

"By the Holy Trinity, Lord Gui was my father!" swore Matteo. "And I can say in all seriousness, he would have put you in his sorriest dungeon had he ever guessed you would be willing to part with his property to any knave who carried Sinan's signet-ring."

"Hush!" cautioned Messer Gambaglio, horrified. "Do not speak so! You can never tell who may hear. And would not you, yourself, abandon anything you own to the Command?"

"I do not know," replied Matteo. "You see," he added, realizing he must play a part, "I have not carried the signet long."

"Never let any of the followers hear you express doubt," advised the merchant. " 'Tis a mortal offense. But one thing more, lordling. Is your father truly dead?"

"Do you deem all the world to be liars?" demanded Matteo, half angry, half amused.

Messer Gambaglio shrugged.

"What matters it if you lie?" he answered. "You have only to present the signet to take what you wish. Is it life? Then give me the dagger at your belt, and I will slay myself. Is it gold? Whatever I have in my strong-boxes is your's. Is it service? Name your commands, and I will strive to obey the most unreasonable."

"Why?"

"You speak for the Lord of Death!"

"But you are not one of the Assassins! You are a Christian, a Frank, are you not?"

"Aye, but Sinan hath countless followers who are not of the Assassins—if by such you mean those who have been born into the creed of Islam."

"Hath he other agents such as you?"

" 'Tis plain you are new to our ranks, Messer Matteo. I am but one of many. We are everywhere, but few know us for what we are. And let me counsel you not to reveal me or others you may chance to meet. You are young. You have great favor in the possession of that ring. If you would live long, be discreet. I am an old man. I have served Sinan longer than you have lived. And I know."

"I thank you," said Matteo gravely. "Now, prithee, tell me what moneys my father had with you."

Messer Gambaglio climbed to his feet, and drew from the breast of his robe a scroll.

"Of moneys," he began, "Lord Gui had outstanding with me 25,000 bezants, and in addition there are various stores of precious stones and rich stuffs which he committed to my care for sale when occasion serves. What is your wish as to them?"

Matteo experienced a sensation of heart-warming comfort. Landless he might be, but henceforth he might scorn the world.

"The moneys you will transfer to my name," he directed, trying to speak as if such orders were customary for him to make. "Two hundred bezants you will furnish me for my immediate wants. A thousand more you will place to my order with a banker of Antioch. The gems and stuffs you will sell."

"All shall be duly attended to. You will find me diligent in your affairs, magnificent signor. Is there aught else?"

"Not at the present," replied Matteo with lordly indifference. "But stay! Will Kafur come this way again?"

"Aye, he is one of the eyes of the Lord of Death."

"When next you see him, tell him that Matteo, the son of the lord of Nerak, who saved him from the Templars, is at the court of Antioch."

"It shall be done, Messer Matteo. And prithee, if opportunity occurs, commend me to the Old One."

"I shall not forget," promised Matteo.

Messer Gambaglio genuflected somewhat stiffly, and backed from the room. Matteo leaped to the door and listened to his heavy tread as he descended the stairs, then summoned Ali from the stupor in which the old Turcople was cast.

"Ali, heard you what I heard?"

"Why, lord, as to that—well—there was talk of this and that—and an old one—and treasure. But I had drunk overmuch."

Matteo heaved a deep sigh.

"At the least, we heard the same things," he said. "Nay, it must be true, Ali, for no two men could be drunk exactly the same."

"You have the right of it, Messer Matteo," Ali decided at length. "Now I think of it I have never known another man to be quite so drunk in the same way as myself. Also, I see that you have the ring in your hand. All things happen for the ring. Nay, it must have been."

"All things happen for the ring," echoed Matteo. " 'Tis in my mind that this ring is like to become a heavy charge upon me."

TO BE CONTINUED

BOONE HELM—BAD-MAN

by E. A. Brininstool

BOONE HELM, undoubtedly the lowest, most depraved specimen of humanity that ever cumbered the old frontier, was a native of Kentucky. His family later moved to Missouri, where the boy lived amid surroundings well calculated to steep one of his naturally depraved instincts to the lowest depths.

Here he gained a reputation for all-around badness which was of the very worst sort, gaining notoriety as a murderer and bully, being ugly and considered a very dangerous man. When Helm finally pulled stakes for the Western gold-diggings, the community in which he had resided drew a breath of relief at getting rid of him.

First in the California gold-fields Helm met birds of his own feather, being quick with his gun and ever ready for a scrap where the bullets flew thick. Here it is said he killed several men, and his reputation was so bad that he eventually had to flee the coast. He turned up at The Dalles, in Oregon, about 1853, where with some companions he started for Fort Hall, Idaho.

Hostile Indians attacked the party on the Bannack River, from which after great privations they managed to reach Soda Springs, but in bad condition, their horses having played out and their grub as well. Helm and a companion named Burton alone survived the rest of the march.

These two pushed on to an old cabin, where, so Helm claimed, Burton committed suicide, although he probably was murdered by Helm. Here the cannibal nature of Helm asserted itself, and he lay over several days feasting on the dead body of his companion, eventually wrapping up one of the legs of the corpse and eating it along the trail. He finally reached the Mormon settlements around Salt Lake, where he boasted of his crime.

Later Helm returned to the Montana gold-fields, joining the Plummer Gang and becoming the most brutal fiend in all the band. How many men he killed during his lifetime never will be known, but the figure is large. He shot and killed one "Dutch Fred" while the latter stood unarmed facing him. Helm fled into British Columbia, where it is asserted he murdered and ate another lone companion who was traveling with him.

Turning up later at Virginia City, Helm's reputation for badness became such that the vigilantes determined that a necktie party was the only thing for Boone Helm. He was arrested by strategy in front of the Virginia Hotel by three of the vigilantes. When he was marched into the presence of the judges and told why he was wanted he exclaimed with an oath—

"You would have had a great time taking me if I'd known what you wanted me for."

When charged with being a member of the Plummer Gang and declared guilty of highway robbery and murder this arch-fiend exclaimed:

"Why, gentlemen, I am as innocent as a new-born babe. I never murdered any one and will swear to it on the Bible."

A Bible was handed Helm, and the perverted scoundrel actually kissed the Holy Book and solemnly protested his innocence of any man's blood. However, he was told that this protestation would avail him nothing, unmistakable proof of his guilt being ample, and Helm was ordered to prepare for death. Later in the day, in private, he confessed to numerous murders to one of the vigilantes, although he would give no information concerning the other members of the Plummer Gang.

With Helm to the gallows went Jack Gallagher, "Clubfoot George," Hayes Lyon and Frank Parish.

"Say, old fellow," said Gallagher to a friend, "I'm going to heaven. I'll be there in time to open the gate for you."

After the nooses were adjusted he added—"How do I look, boys, with a halter around my neck?" Then finally—

"I hope I will meet every one of you in the lowest pit of ——."

Then Gallagher was swung up.

Boone Helm's turn came next, and as he surveyed Gallagher he exclaimed—

"Kick away, old fellow; there goes one to ——, and I'll be with you, Gallagher, in a minute."

Then he shouted in a loud voice: "Every man for his principles! Hurrah for Jeff Davis! Let her rip!"

And his body fell with a jerk.

Intuition

by Henry Leverage

Author of "The Shell-Back," "The Frozen Glass," etc.

SHE was the *Calipso*—a four-masted, topsail schooner—varnished, holystoned, new-rigged; the pride of her owner's eye as she lay tugging at her anchor-chain across the Bay from San Francisco.

Her owner and skipper, "Micky" McMasters, had ventured his all in the *Calipso* and a certain Australasian pearl concession—best reached by heading south of the Line and running before the trades, after Fiji was reached, until Nati came up out of a sapphire sea like a painting on a Japanese fan.

Micky McMasters called Nati "The White Man's Graveyard." He had returned to San Francisco in order to obtain medicine, stores and American divers; the last were hard to get in the South Seas and wanted much red gold for their services.

Rolling down East Street, San Francisco, Micky spied, from astern, the bowed back and swinging arms of an old-time shipmate who resembled a wreck on a hostile shore. The sailor was lurching and tacking and mumbling incoherently. Micky crept upon the man and looked him over, from broken brogans to a sorry-looking headpiece; the clothes he wore were evidently the last from a meager locker.

"Howdy, matey?" said Micky McMasters with just a touch of cockney in his speech.

"Howdy, 'Blue Peter'!"

Blue Peter pried open a pair of matted eyes.

"Who calls?" asked he.

Micky McMasters shrank from the derelict—Blue Peter reeked of gin and vice; the lips of him were swollen and the old-time fire had died.

"Who hails?" repeated Blue Peter.

Recognition came to the shell-back; his twisted digits clawed the air; they fell upon Micky's broad shoulders and fastened with the nails ripping the cloth of the little skipper's pea-jacket.

"Jumpin' bowheads!" said Blue Peter. "It's you!"

Micky squirmed—he was in for it—Blue Peter, like the *Ancient Mariner,* was not to be denied. Close came his whiskered face.

"Jumpin' bowheads! Help me out, mate. I'm cast away an' near to starvation. You were with me on th' *Orca*—remember?"

The mutiny of the *Orca,* in the Arctic, could not be forgotten. Micky avoided Blue Peter's talons, stepped back, drew out a watch and said:

"It's six bells. I must be goin'. Will a little siller come in 'andy, Blue Peter?"

"Siller, yes—but sign me off this cursed land—if you will save my life. Th' pilot-fishes an' sharks an' harpies o' th' coast have plucked me clean. I want deep sea again—away from sinful men. McMasters, for ——'s sake save an old mate! Ship me somewhere."

Micky McMasters whipped out a card, wrote directions, added two paper dollars, and steered away from Blue Peter. He went about his business, obtained the last diver, paid for stores—to be delivered on board the *Calipso* that afternoon—then, when evening came, he crossed the ferry to Oakland and chartered a Whitehall boat which carried him to the schooner.

One thing he noticed when climbing aboard after paying the boatman: Blue Peter sat on the forecastle deck, smoking a cord-wrapped pipe, and the gray-thatched eyes of the mariner were fixed in the onshore wind that came through the Golden Gate.

"You sent him out," said "Red" Landyard, the mate.

Micky clicked a strong jaw.

"Gol blyme, yes!"

"What for? He's no use!"

Gripping the schooner's polished rail, Micky McMasters leaned until his head was over the water. The boatman and the Whitehall boat were floating back to Oakland; a silver dusk lay over the hills, broken in the north by the yellow flame of San Francisco. Micky turned his glance upon Blue Peter.

"Red," he said to the Yankee mate, "you an' I 'ave sailed an' steamed since we were lads. We think we know th' sea—but we only think so. Blue Peter is older than hus an' far wiser. 'E works by intuition—a good compass to steer by. 'E told me, six, seven years ago, that th' crew of th' *Orza* were on murder bent—an' they were! It was Blue Peter who saved me from an Arctic grave. So, Blue Peter stays forrard, an' we'll all turn in—for we're leavin' when th' wind shifts at sun-up. I got my clearance papers—everything!"

Micky McMasters strode across the deck, and entered his cabin by way of a sliding door at the break of the poop.

THE *Calipso*, full-handed, with a bone at her yacht-like prow and every sail set to an offshore breeze, cleared the land of California and plunged upon the vasty blue.

Red Landyard, the American mate, worked the booze out of the six foremast hands, including Blue Peter, and inspected the divers' quarters in the galley—where four men were quartered with the cook—men whom Micky had paid five hundred dollars advance in San Francisco for their service in getting pearls from a reef too deep for native divers to reach. Then the mate went aft, spat to leeward, and climbed the quarter-deck steps at the top of which stood Micky McMasters.

"Wall," said the mate, "everything is shipshape except that Old Man of th' Sea you sent aboard. He's goin' to be about as useful to me as a sick walrus."

Micky McMasters gulped at a memory.

" 'Andle 'im gently—poor soul, this may be 'is last passage."

"I'll make it his last!"

Micky's tattooed hands closed over the mate's wrists.

"Watch Blue Peter—get acquainted with 'im. 'E ain't no Shippin' Board apprentice. 'E's full o' intuition. See 'im now—a-standin' by th' fore-sheet. 'Ow did 'e know I was about to sing hout to slacken that sheet?"

Red Landyard eyed Blue Peter, then squinted to windward.

"Th' breeze is shiftin' to th' north—guess Blue Peter saw that an' stood by."

Mickey nodded.

"Yes, he suspected I'd give th' order. That's where th' salt is thickest—on men like Blue Peter. 'E don't need no orders—'e thinks ahead."

A gust from over the starboard quarter indicated that the wind had veered; Red Landyard gave the order to slacken sheets. He sprang to the deck and assisted a Lascar who shared the watch with Blue Peter—the third sailor on deck being at the wheel.

Coming back to Micky's side, on the quarter-deck, Red said cuttingly:

"Your old man may work by intuition—but he don't do any other kind of work. He couldn't belay a main-sheet—he's weak, skipper, an' —— surly."

" 'Andle 'im gently," was all Micky said.

Later the cockney captain drew the mate aft by the rocking taffrail.

"What do you think of my divers?" he questioned. "Gol blyme, I promised my boy I'd get th' best in 'Frisco! D'you think I succeeded, Red?"

Micky's "boy" was aged twenty-three—he had charge of a pearl-shed, two hundred natives, and much gear, located on the island of Nati. He was McMaster's son—by a wife who lived at Great Grimbsy, England—a helpmate who awaited the fortune that was promised from the torrid seas.

"What do you think of my divers?" repeated Micky.

Red Landyard shifted a chew of tobacco from one cheek to the other. "What do I think? Why, skipper, they look capable of anything. They were playing poker, drinking from a square-face of gin, an' they all! ——ed me when I inspected their bunks. I think you got picked men—picked for meanness. Like as not they'll murder a few natives at Nati."

"But will they get th' hoysters?"

"Pearls?"

"Gol blyme, yes—th' pearls!"

"They may get them—but they look as if they'd keep some for themselves."

"My boy'll see that they don't!" said Micky.

* * *

THE *Calipso* ran before north-eastern gales for two days and made grand time. The divers were seasick and quarrelsome; they fought with the cook, messed up the galley, called Red Landyard forward and argued with him concerning their quarters—which, on account of following seas, were wet.

Red had a tobacco-stained beard, a glittering pair of eyes, and fists like blocks. He proceeded, while Micky watched from the quarter-deck and Blue Peter stood near by, with ultimate instructions:

"Two of you come out on deck an' share th' watch! Two of you turn in—I'll need you next watch. Th' articles you signed called for assistance in case of necessity. There's a necessity! Lay aloft an' furl that maintopsail! You I mean—an' you I mean!"

Red's eyes flamed; he selected a puny-looking diver, yanked him from the galley and hurled him toward the mainmast. The next to follow was a big man—who melted in the mate's nipping grip.

The two divers climbed the weather shrouds, cursed the schooner, and strained their arms in the biting gale that came over stern. The maintopsail was made snug—in a fashion. Returning to the deck, the two divers avoided Red Landyard, went forward, and stood near where Blue Peter crouched at the forecastle companion.

"I guess that'll larn them who's boss here," said the mate to Micky Masters. "They act like first-cabin passengers!"

Micky's grin was unholy.

"Keep them on deck until we run down hour latitude—they've 'ad too much gin an' not henough ginger for deep-reef diving."

Blue Peter came aft at the change of watch, touched a gray forelock and looked at McMasters.

"Can I speak to you a minute, skipper?"

Micky nodded and watched the old salt climb the weather steps. Blue Peter grasped the quarter-deck rail.

"You got four men in th' galley, skipper."

"Gol blyme, yes!"

"Three o' them are divers—after a fashion. Th' other, skipper, is no diver. He's never been under th' surface—unless he fell overboard. How do I know, skipper?"

Micky's jaw squared; he clenched his fists.

"Yes, 'ow d'you know?"

Blue Peter took his time; he pulled out his cord-wrapped pipe, filled it with black tobacco, struck a sulfur match on a dry spot, shielded his flame, and puffed slowly.

"I've been goin' deep sea, man an' boy, for almost fifty years. I've been on pearlers an' blackbirders an' copra schooners an' traders; an' I've never yet seen a diver who couldn't breathe."

Micky glared at the shell-back.

"What d'you mean?"

Slowly Blue Peter's pipe-stem steadied on the galley-house, out from which came a trailing smudge of smoke that shot forward and was whipped over the plunging bow.

"What do I mean, skipper? I mean what I saw with my own eyes—they not being of the best, I may be wrong—but th' mate—a good man—sent th' divers aloft to furl sail, an' when th' divers came forrard one of them was blowin' like a porpoise stranded on a sandbar. He was short-winded; is that th' way for a diver to be?"

"Which one?"

Micky Masters shot the question through gritted teeth.

Blue Peter placed the pipe-stem in his mouth, puffed deliberately, squinted his eyes and said:

"It wasn't th' little diver—as I'd suspect from th' build o' him—it was th' big man who blowed so hard. Says I then an' there, skipper, he's a harpy sailin' under false colors."

The cockney captain was off the poop and forward in a rush of indignation; he disappeared in the galley-house; he reappeared dragging the big diver whom Red Landyard had sent aloft to furl the maintopsail. Backed against a dipping rail, with the green seas lipping the scuppers, Micky held the man and called for Red Landyard.

The mate, half-dressed, in vermilion-hued underwear and with a pair of heavy trousers dragging around his knees, appeared from the cabin. He lunged to the skipper.

"What's this—mutiny?"

Micky shoved the pseudo-diver forward.

"This man admits 'e's a sham!" shouted the little skipper. " 'E signed on an', as Blue Peter says, 'e's never done any divin'. 'E was only a pump-hand—an' I gave 'im five hundred advance. What'll my boy at Nati say?"

"Blue Peter?" queried the Yankee mate, looking around the deck.

"Yes, Blue Peter guessed this miserable lump was a sham."

"Blue Peter deducted it?"

" 'E did hit by intuition—'is intuition is strong! Get forrard, you!" snapped the irate skipper. "Turn hinto th' fo'cas'le where you belong!"

Micky McMasters went to the galley after the man had dropped down the forecastle companion; he told the three divers what he required of them and added that he was captain of the schooner.

"No more shams go with me! I'm expectin' to try you out at seventeen fathoms when we reach Nati—an' may 'Eaven 'elp you hif you don't stay down an 'our—because my boy is lookin' for real deep-reef divers!"

Red Landyard cooled the cockney skipper's blood with a question concerning Blue Peter when McMasters came fuming out of the galley.

"This Old Man of th' Sea," drawled the mate, "this wreck you believe so firmly in—how does he happen to be before th' mast? He might have owned ships, I guess?"

"Blyme, yes!"

Micky glared at the galley, then forward, then tested the wind by a biting glance at the sun and well-filled foresail.

" 'E might," said the skipper "or owned a line of packets—'e's old henough an' wise henough! I minds him well on th' *Orca;* 'e 'asn't changed one bit. 'E was always predictin' things that came true—'e knew which way th' ice would drift an' where th' lanes were, an' just th' spot to find a bowhead. 'E's a 'oly terror on intuition!"

"It's probably based on experience," said the practical mate.

"Hit's based on th' queer things of th' sea—th' change of compass point in time to avoid a reef, or th' shiftin' of helm when there's a rock ahead, or th' feelin' that there's a lee shore somewhere to lee'ard, or——"

"I had that experience once, Micky. I was second mate on a windjammer—*The Bounding Billow*—out of 'Frisco. We were off Chili somewhere, when th' old man changes th' course for no reason at all, an' we picks up a long-boat filled with passengers from th' wrecked coaster *Iquique.* Why th' old man took that notion I don't know—an' he didn't either. It was intuition."

Micky nodded.

"We've brought good luck with hus—because Blue Peter is goin' to keep us out of trouble."

GOOD luck held, for the schooner *Calipso,* all the way down the long slant of the South Pacific; gales quieted to following winds; a breeze wafted them over the Line. Micky and Red Landyard had little or nothing to do, save keep the sheets trimmed and the schooner on her course for Nati.

Islands, as fair from a distance as visions in a dream, rose from the tropic sea—spicy odors came within the wind—a feeling settled on the schooner's crew of good cheer and kindness. Blue Peter, freed from his vice, gin, started making clothes, shoes, even a hat. He came on deck clad in duck trousers and muslin shirt; his gray beard was trimmed; his eyes were less watery.

"Your Old Man of th' Sea," suggested the Yankee mate, "is getting spry. He likes these latitudes."

" 'E's welcome!" said Micky. "All I want from this 'ot-'ouse world are pearls—then we set course for England an' Great Grimsby. I 'aven't seen th' missus in two years—my boy 'asn't seen 'is mother in five. Is that any way to treat th' best you 'ave?"

Red Lanyard squinted at Blue Peter, who stood braced against the galley-house. The old salt's pipe was glowing; his cheeks seemed almost ruddy.

Suddenly Blue Peter's right fingers coiled around his pipe-stem; his hand dropped; he closed his eyes and shook his head. Micky and the mate heard him mutter dolefully:

"Trouble ahead. Yea, there's trouble."

The cockney skipper thrust one-half of his body over the quarter-deck rail.

" 'Vast with that croakin'!" he shouted.

Blue Peter pried open his eyes, replaced the pipe in his mouth, hitched his trousers and rolled forward, where he disappeared under a foreboom.

" 'E's a regular Davy Jones!"

The little captain spat to the deck.

" 'E's no prophet; 'e's bad luck!"

"I thought he was good luck," the mate drawled.

"I've changed my mind!" snapped Micky.

NATI, more lovely, from a distance, than a novelist's description, was reached thirty-one days out of San Francisco. Micky took the wheel from the wheelman and set a course for the lagoon's entrance—a narrow rapid of tidal water. He brought the *Calipso* through safely, floated across the lagoon and broadsided alongside a rotting wharf at the land end of which were two long warehouses built by a defunct Dutch trading company.

Natives, headed by the white men of that port, came swarming out of the town. Heading the islanders was Micky's son, Bob McMasters, who climbed over the schooner's rail and embraced his father. Turning, resting his chin on the cockney skipper's shoulder, the son asked as he counted the crew of the *Calipso*—

"I hope for goodness' sake you brought the divers?"

"Gol blyme, yes!"

Red Landyard heard Micky's pointed question which followed his "Gol blyme!"

"Lad, 'ow are th' pearls?"

"Not so good, father. We've cleaned the five-fathom reef."

Bob McMasters pointed a steady hand toward the south shore of the lagoon.

"We cleaned that beastly well, with the help of native divers. Then we've been getting some up from the six-fathom reef—over there."

Bob's arm swung northward.

"But the best of the lot are too deep—except for diving-gear and good men. I hope the men you brought are capable fellows."

Micky led his son to the galley-house, where they inspected the gear brought from San Francisco and talked with the three deep-reef white divers. The fourth man sat on a hatch forward and glared aft. Blue Peter towered above this man and cast a shadow upon him. Red Landyard, after inspecting the two shore lines—the schooner was to remain at Nati—stretched his lanky legs by visiting the American consul.

"Do you calculate," queried the mate, "that 'McMasters and Son' will clean up a fortune in their concession?"

The American consul mopped a heated brow and closed one eye vigorously.

"They may!"

"What are their chances?"

"Deep-reef diving has been tried here—it didn't work. There's a pearl in about every thousand oysters. I wish they'd get the rotten mess off the beach."

Red Landyard went to the schooner. Micky and Son had gone to the pearl-sheds with the divers and gear. Blue Peter sat under an awning of his own making, sewing a patch on a sail.

"Well, what do you think of Nati?" questioned the Yankee.

Blue Peter stopped sewing, palmed the needle and blinked toward the jungle's fringe that came down to the still waters of the lagoon. The old salt's eyes raised and fastened upon a line of mist-hidden hills that marked the island's interior. He resumed sewing, closed his eyes, and muttered—

"There's fever here—an' somethin' else."

"What else, Blue Peter?"

Slowly the shell-back's head wagged.

"I don't fathom—what else—but it's somethin'."

Red Landyard shivered slightly, although the sun was hot, and glanced at the rotten wharf. He noticed that both hawsers securing the *Calipso* dipped into stagnant lagoon, raised, and dipped again—as if there were an unseen swell upon the surface of the water.

McMasters came back to the schooner at sundown; the little cockney skipper was enthusiastic.

"We're goin' to get th' pearls this time!" he declared. "Red, there's a lava reef, where my boy is workin' with th' three divers, that's rich as th' Bank o' England. It's that rich!"

"Look out for fever," cautioned the mate. "Blue Peter senses it, I guess."

"Th' lad's immune; 'e's tough with right livin' an' youth. 'E's layin' it hout to those divers, an' they're afraid of 'im."

"I mean *you* should look out for fever."

The little skipper glared toward Blue Peter.

" 'E said that! 'E's always croakin'. I wish I'd left 'im ashore at 'Frisco. Maybe we did wrong, Red, in bringin' 'im with hus."

The ancient seaman came slowly down the cleared deck and stood beside McMasters.

"Ye were speakin' of fever just now—I overheard you. Yon's th' answer to th' fever. See th' kirk over there an' th' graveyard. How many have died at Nati?"

Again Red Landyard felt a chill in the tropic air; he followed the direction of Blue Peter's shaking finger and saw a broken-down church beneath the cross for which was a jungle-tangled graveyard—the resting-place of many Dutch traders and white beachcombers. Nati, with all its charm, was a fever-hole.

Micky went into the cabin and called the mate to him.

"Red," he said, "we'll hopen a square-face of trade gin an' forget th' old fool's croakin'! My boy's not set on leavin' this port for many weeks. 'Ere's 'ow to success in th' pearls!"

SUCCESS, in a measure, came to Micky McMasters and Son; the three divers gutted the seventeen-fathom lava-reef and repaired their gear for deeper diving on a twenty-fathom reef at the northeast bight of the lagoon. They worked through the tropic days.

Micky assisted. Once the little skipper went down himself, but the strain was too much for his unaccustomed lungs. He spat blood and bent over with pains when he returned to the *Calipso*.

"Better take to your bunk," advised Red Landyard. "I'll get a doctor from town if th' pains continue."

"Gin!" gulped Micky.

He grew dizzy, reeled, fell over; and Red Landyard had to lift him into the cabin-bunk. The mate opened the portholes, stationed a Lascar as nurse, and went on deck. Blue Peter stood in the waist of the schooner, regarding the slimy walls of the wharf and trading-sheds.

"Th' old man's got th' bends," said the mate.

Blue Peter nodded.

"He'll have worse than that, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, this is a cursed island—no good ever came out of Nati. Wasn't I here in '89? I was here, sir, as —— knows, an' there was fever then. Cappin Jones of th' *Bernicia* almost died of it—an' three of th' crew grew black as pitch an' sprang overboard. But it wasn't that I feared of this island—it is somethin' else——"

Red Landyard glared over the top of his beard.

"You quit your croaking! —— you, quit!"

Old Blue Peter rolled forward, filled his pipe, sat down on the forecastle deck and puffed slowly as he eyed the dipping shore-lines and the sheer of the trading-shed. A silence came upon the lagoon; the tropic stars torched the night—the world slept.

Bob McMasters came on the wharf at sunup.

"How's th' governor?" he called to Red Landyard.

The mate climbed ashore and whispered, out of any possible hearing of Blue Peter or the cook:

"I guess your old man's all right, Bob. He's been spittin' blood—but not much. I calculate he'll pull through, with th' medicine I gave him an' a little quiet. He seems to have a touch o' fever—not much. I dosed him with veronal an' fed him quinin three times. Better let him sleep—an' go on with your pearling."

Bob McMasters strode up the wharf and took the jungle trail that led to the pearling-sheds at the north of the lagoon. Red Landyard, watching, concluded he had never seen a finer young man.

The doctor came to the schooner in the morning and sat on the edge of Micky's bunk.

"What you need," he said after taking the little skipper's temperature, "is sea air, and plenty of it. You're a blue-water man—and this lagoon is almost stagnant."

Red Landyard saw the doctor ashore; then the mate returned to Micky's cabin.

"Suppose," drawled the mate, "we take Blue Peter and the Lascar and set out. Bob can do without you for a few days. I guess that doctor was right."

"I'm willin' to do anythin'," breathed Micky. "I wish I 'ad a ton of ice!"

The mate went on deck and consulted with Blue Peter, who was leaning over the rail in the bow, watching the shore-lines dipping in the slime of the lagoon. The seaman turned his head.

"Ye are right," he said, "about goin' to sea for th' old man's health. We all should go away from here. Ye see that?"

Blue Peter's fingers were spread toward the rotting wharf.

"See th' rats—they've been swarmin' along th' shore-lines all night an' all day.

They're comin' aboard like Canton pirates —big, whiskered ones an' little ones with beady eyes—all squeakin' an' hurryin'; an' some o' them drowned an' some o' them got over——"

"Well, what of it, Blue Peter?"

"They're frightened out of their holes."

"Why should they come aboard?"

"Because th' schooner is stanch—an' healthful. Rats know things we don't know. Look at that one comin'—crawlin'—he's a wise rat."

The mate had seen rats climbing aboard ships and schooners many times in his life. He became openly skeptical.

"You think there will be a plague ashore —but there won't be any."

"Ye know?"

The Yankee mate felt like gripping Blue Peter's throat and throwing him over the rail.

"Ever since we left 'Frisco," he exclaimed, "you've been mumblin' an' rantin' an' cantin'. 'Vast with it an' act like a man!"

Slowly the old salt's head turned toward the shore; he leaned and watched the dripping hawsers, down which, spaced like knots in a line, came rats that squeaked and were engulfed in the slime of the lagoon. One, a big fellow, scrambled aboard the schooner, ran between Red Landyard's outspread legs and disappeared beneath a bucket-rack in the waist of the *Calipso*.

"Ye saw that?" croaked Blue Peter.

Red Landyard shrugged his shoulders; he went aft to Mickey's cabin. The little skipper felt better.

"We'll go out of this cursed lagoon—some time tonight—an' cruise for a breeze. Get a deck of cards, Red. We'll play pinocle."

An idle day passed; the mate at nightfall informed the shipkeepers, a Lascar and Blue Peter, that the schooner would clear Nati at high tide—seven bells in the morning. Blue Peter leaned from the rail.

"Ye are leaving young McMasters behind?"

"Certainly!"

Blue Peter shook his head.

" 'Tis wise to go out—but not without th' old man's boy."

"Nonsense!" the mate exclaimed. "Bob has got to watch th' divers. If he don't they'll steal whatever pearls they get."

* * *

MIDNIGHT, eight bells, found Blue Peter acting strangely. He shuffled a lone watch across the *Calipso's* planks, eyed the shore, sighed, grew restless, glanced aft and finally became remarkably spry for an aged man.

The sail-locker was open; Blue Peter went over its contents and selected a marlinspike with a twine-wrapped handle. He balanced this in his hand, swung it, then hid it beneath his shirt where it could be readily pulled out.

Pausing, he again glanced aft where Micky McMasters and Red Landyard were sleeping. No sound came from the cabin—the Lascar was doubled in a forecastle bunk.

The *Calipso* floated near enough to the rotting wharf for a determined man's spring. Blue Peter made the leap, landed on the wharf, rose and stood silently regarding the shadows that stretched from the sheds to the sleeping town and the scrub jungle.

He half-ran, half-staggered, along the shore of the lagoon and came by a sandy trail to the pearl-shacks where Bob McMasters and the divers slept.

A dog barked; a native appeared, crawling from a thatched tent. Blue Peter shouted that McMasters was ill and called for Bob to come to the schooner at once. Bob appeared, clad in white pajamas.

"Bring the pearls," said Blue Peter. "The old man is ravin' to see 'em. Come at once!"

Cursing the hour, Bob disappeared into the shack and reappeared with trousers and shoes on.

"Follow me," said Blue Peter.

The old salt stumbled along the sandy trail and struck around the lagoon; Bob McMasters had difficulty keeping up with him.

"What happened to my father?" he questioned. "Is the fever worse?"

Blue Peter did not answer; he shook his head dolefully and fingered the pointed end of the cord-wrapped marlinspike. The two men passed between the trading-sheds and came out upon the wharf. Bob eyed the schooner, seized hold of the shore-line that ran to the bow and pulled on it. The *Calipso* gradually was drawn in his direction.

Bob leaped, and Blue Peter followed after him; they landed in a sprawled heap near the forehatch. Out was whipped the marlinspike from Blue Peter's shirt; he crouched, leaned forward and brought the well-wrapped handle down across Bob's forehead. The blow was repeated—this time over the ear. McMasters' son fell flat, quivered, then was still with his strong features turned to the tropic stars.

Blue Peter dragged Bob to the open forehatch, lowered away and followed after him. The old salt cut line, bound Bob's hands and feet, triced him beyond any chance of moving, gagged him with a piece of canvas, and hauled McMasters' son forward until he was wedged between two cases near the forecastle bulkhead. Then the seaman climbed on deck, pulled the hatch over the coaming and resumed his lone watch as if nothing had happened.

Red Landyard, yawning, appeared at six bells. The Yankee mate studied the surface of the lagoon, lifted his chin, sensed the slight offshore breeze and ordered Blue Peter to call the Lascar and spread foresail and staysail.

"We're goin' away from your —— rats!" said the sleepy mate.

Blue Peter looked at the wharf.

"They're swarmin' aboard, sir. Like as not th' hold is full of them."

"We should worry—they're good luck!"

Blue Peter went about the business of rousting out the Lascar, drawing in shore-lines, coiling them up, and hoisting foresail and jib.

The *Calipso*, with Red Landyard hanging on the wheel, sheered from the wharf and glided across the lagoon. The tide, being at flood, allowed room for the keel over the lava at the strait, and the schooner drove to sea.

Noontime found Nati horizon-down and a bracing breeze singing through the *Calipso's* rigging. Micky, as if he had been given new wine, appeared on deck and walked briskly to the quarter-deck rail. He glanced over and saw Blue Peter standing in the bow; the old seaman's face was turned toward a smudge that marked the island.

" 'E's sorry we set sail," said the little skipper to the mate. " 'E's longin' for Nati."

Red Landyard cut a chew from a plug of tobacco.

"Blue Peter isn't sorry, skipper. He's glad. He was croakin' concernin' rats an' Nati ever since we went there. I don't fathom that old barnacle, an' I never will. He's queer!"

" 'E's got intuition."

A diversion occurred aboard the *Calipso* when the sun set with a rush of scarlet streamers flamingoing the west. Across the sea came a tidal bore—an unusually high wave—that rocked the schooner, swung her three points off course, and set sails and standing rigging flapping.

"Gol blyme!" exclaimed Micky. What was that?"

The little skipper unconsciously glanced toward Nati—more than horizon-down. He reeled and grasped Red Landyard's arm.

"Was that a dizzy stroke, or ham I seein' things?"

"Here it comes again," drawled the mate. "It's a bunch of tidal waves—each bigger than th' other! Look out—hang on to somethin'—we're in for it, proper!"

THE *Calipso* tossed and twisted like a chip in a whirlpool—the bow went under, then the stern was sucked between mountainous waves. A racking was in the air—rain fell—far-off explosions sounded with tropical thunder.

Daybreak revealed a scene of desolation. Lava floated on the sea—wreckage, mud, silt discolored the water. The schooner's deck and tangled rigging were coated with pink slime. Over the heavens was spread a pall through which the sun tried to appear.

"We'll make for Nati!" Micky shouted to Red Landyard. "Clear that foresail. 'Ere comes a wind!"

The mate, aided by Blue Peter and the Lascar, succeeded in setting the sail and taking advantage of a hot wind from the south. The fast schooner heeled over. Micky hung to the wheel.

Noon came and was passed; it was in the long forenoon next day before a canoe was raised and a course set to intercept it. The cockney skipper shouted to the natives in the canoe—

"What 'appened at Nati?"

A brown giant pointed a frightened finger toward the bottom of the sea.

"Nati gone," he answered. "Big mountain blow up—all gone, cappin. We go too—for next island."

Micky reeled from the rail; Red Landyard caught the little skipper and carried him toward the cabin companion.

"My boy's gone too," sobbed Micky. "That island is no more."

Blue Peter came up the quarter-deck

steps and intercepted Micky and the mate as they were going down the companion.

"'Jus' a moment, skipper. There's somethin' forrard I want to show you. I kinda had an idea that Nati was no place for a white man's son—so I brought him aboard an' laid him out nicely."

"You brought my Bob aboard?"

Blue Peter touched his cap.

"He is in th' forehold—next th' fo'castle bulkhead. He's got th' pearls in a poke around his neck, sir."

Micky struggled from Red's arms, staggered over the quarter-deck, went down the steps and dashed forward to the forehatch. The Lascar aided the little skipper in getting the slime from the hatch and opening it. A glad and somewhat indignant shout racked the schooner when Micky came upon his trussed-up son.

Red Landyard nipped Blue Peter's arm.

"I guess you're responsible," drawled the mate. "An' I guess you'll be forgiven. How did you know that Nati would blow up? You must have deducted it—or used intuition."

"I used some o' one an' some of th' other, sir. Ye know rats desert a sinkin' ship—then why wouldn't they desert a volcanic island?"

Blue Peter touched his gray forelock and walked off the quarter-deck.

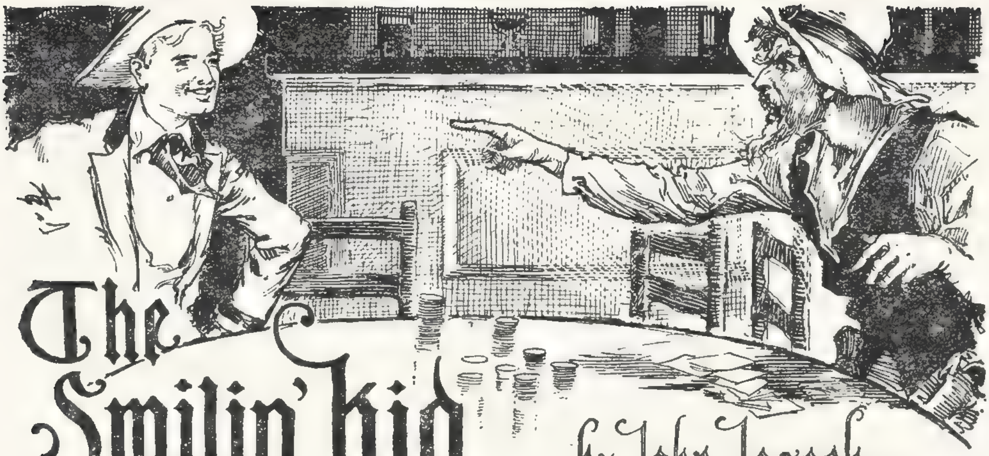
SEA GULLS

by Glenn Ward Dresbach

SEA GULLS are dreams of sailormen
Who can not go to sea again;
They haunt the harbors rich with lees
Of old wine of the tropic seas;
They haunt the paths of ships that turn
To ports of wonder they must yearn—
And, crying their futility,
Still dip their wings in vastness of the Sea.

And I have seen old rovers wait
Beside the wharves, insatiate,
With smell of spray, with longing eyes,
Following sea gulls in the skies
Above the ships—now left behind
By their own dreams, with nothing kind
On earth except the memory
Of lust and magic of the passionate Sea.

O sea gulls, bring from hinterlands
The moonlight creeping on the sands,
A bit of tossing foam the stars
Turned into pearls by drifted spars;
And bring a snatch of song, from lips
Like wild hibiscus, blown to ships
In tropic bays, that there may be,
For sailors old, signs from their love—the Sea!



The Smilin' Kid

by John Joseph

YOU'RE dead right, stranger; the battle don't always go to the strong, nor yet to the swift. A man may put in years learning to do something better than anybody else can do it, and then lose out at last on account of his head workin' too slow. I've seen it work out that-a-way many a time.

There was "Happy Jack" Bascom, for instance. There was a guy that sure knew what his head was made for. I met him first down in the old Porcupine Camp in the Blue Mountains of Eastern Oregon—in Sixty-seven—right after the war. I saw the Kid—we called him "The Smilin' Kid" in them days—he got the other hung on to him long afterwards. I saw him run up against the fastest and—in my opinion—the worst gun-man that ever let off a six-gun in the West.

Ever hear of "Arizona" Peets?—and "Nig" Peets? Them two was brothers—some said twins, but I don't know about that. I do know it was mighty hard to tell which one was the ornariest. Wasn't much choice one way or the other, I reckon.

Porcupine was a roaring placer-camp in them days; one of them places that gets built in a month and boom for a year or two, then peter out slow, until finally there's nobody left but maybe a dozen Chinamen—workin' over the old diggin's; and a quartz prospector or two—lookin' for the mother lode.

"Pop" Baldwin's Log Palace dance-hall was the show place of the camp in the boom days, and it was there that I first laid eyes on the Kid. The Palace was a whacking big building, built entirely of logs, except the floor, which was fir flooring, freighted in from away down on the Columbia some place. There was a bar at the left as you went in, then a big ice-chest, and back of that yet, the girl's bar at one side of the dance-floor. There was a kind of a picket fence across the room, about the middle, with an eight-inch fir log along the top of it. The gambling-tables was in front—where nobody could overlook 'em, you know.

People that had money come in by stage, and them that didn't, generally come in with the freighters. Except prospectors—they 'most always had a pack outfit.

But I never did find out how the Kid got there. He just walked into the Palace from nowhere in particular—one evening about nine—and struck old "Pop" Baldwin for a job. Pop was setting at his desk in his little, fenced-off office behind the front end of the bar, when the Kid hit him. He looked the Kid over for a couple of breaths; then he got up. And that su'prized me—Pop never wasted any time in tellin' a man there was nothing doing.

Pop was a slim, pock-marked, hard-eyed man of forty or thereabouts, and he had a way of choppin' off his words that didn't leave any pe'ticular room for doubt about him meanin' just what he said. Well, Pop got up like I said, and bored the Kid with a hard blue eye for another breath or two; then he said—

"Ever tend bar, young man?"

"The Smilin' Kid," copyright, 1922, by John Joseph.

"No," replied the Kid, "but I've pulled a right smart of corks out of beer-bottles, and I've poured hard liquor out of a jug. I reckon that's about all there is to it."

Pop smiled.

"What is your age?" he shot at the Kid.

"Twenty-two," replied the Kid—without flickering an eyelash.

Pop smiled again—the Kid looked about eighteen.

"When could you go to work?" he demanded.

"Now," the Kid comes back.

"Go back and tell the young man at the girls' bar that I sent you back to try on his bar-coat."

Pop chopped this off, grinned at the Kid, then turned his back and set down. The Kid looked kinda puzzled for a minute, then smiled and strolled back to the girls' bar. "Piker" Lents was tendin' bar. The Kid pulled a smile as Piker come up.

"What'll it be?" says Piker.

"The boss told me to come back and try on your bar-coat," says the Kid. "What did he mean by it?"

"I been expectin' it," says Piker. "It means I'm fired and you get the job," and he began pullin' off the coat.

"Look here!" says the Kid, sharp like. "I don't want——"

Piker chops him off:

"Can it," he says. "If it wasn't you it would be somebody else—I've been due for some time. Here's your coat; it belongs to the house, and it will fit you a lot better than it ever did me, I reckon. Come on around and I'll put you wise to the poison."

And that's the way the Kid started in Porcupine. He was one of the kind that just naturally takes with everybody, and it wa'n't a month till he was friends with every man, woman and child in camp—and the dogs too. There wa'n't more than a dozen youngsters in camp, but they all knew the Kid, and many's the time I've seen him goin' down the street with one astraddle of his neck and two hanging on to each hand and the rest swingin' by his coat tail, and a whole pa'cel of dogs follerin' up.

The Kid wasn't one of your grinners, but there was always a smile in his eyes and the hint of another at the corners of his mouth. There was a red-headed girl in the dance-hall, that everybody called "The Red Child." A hellion she was, with a face like a schoolgirl, and one day she called young Bascom "The Smilin' Kid," and the name stuck—until— But that's another story.

IT WAS never in the cards that the Kid would tend bar for long. He was a born gambler and took to cards like a baby to a nursin'-bottle; and Pop finally gave in and set him behind a poker-table. The game prospered from the first. Pop never stood for crooked work, if he knew about it; and everybody knew the Kid. It was a straight game, and everybody knew it.

It was a tough camp—they all was in them days—and gun-play and killings happened every day or two. Old enemies met and settled old grudges—grudges that started a thousand miles away, maybe—and they fought about water, and claims, and girls, and sometimes about nothing at all—just to settle which was the best man, the quickest on the draw. But the Kid was a born peacemaker, and for a long time there was no trouble at his table.

Winter come and passed on its way; then come the raw Chinook with its melting snow, and the sluice-boxes ran full. Gold poured from every bench and cañon; the camp boomed. The Chinook shaded into a soft, balmy breeze, full of the smell of pine and moist earth; and the birds came, and the flowers, and it was Spring in the hills.

Ever been in the hills, stranger—in the Spring? Well, you've missed a lot. There ain't anything like it in this world, I think; or maybe in the next. Who knows?

The Kid seemed to kinda blossom with the season, too. He was the kind that sets off clothes, and he sure knew how to wear them. With his red-brown silk shirt and tie to match, and close-fitting broadcloth coat and white vest, and velvet pants cut with a flare at the bottom—sailor style—and his broad-brimmed brown hat set well back on his head, he was a lad to gladden the heart of a lass, or pull a second glance from a man, in any crowd any place on this big round earth.

It was common banter around camp that it took him three hours to dress and that he bathed every day, even if he had to break the ice to do it. It wasn't vanity—so much—the boy just wanted to look clean and *be* clean, inside and out. And I reckon there ain't much harm in a lad takin' a little pride in his good looks—if a feller looks at it right.

AND then "Arizona" Peets come to town. Him and his brother "Nig" both had bad-man reputations that run into every corner of the West. They was both two-gun men, and opinion was divided as to which was the quickest on the draw. They never traveled together, and people said there was fierce rivalry between them in the matter of notches on their guns. Just then rumor had it that Nig, with six notches on his right gun and four on his left, was one ahead of Arizona; and so everybody figured on a shootin' scrape with Arizona on one end of it.

Peets was a long, ganglin' cuss, with little, yellow, bloodshot eyes and a whisky nose; and a big, pale red mustache and goat whiskers that was always drippin' tobacco-juice. With the possible exception of his brother, Nig, he was probably the ugliest man West of the Mississippi River. But the man was there with a gun—there wa'n't no question about that—and some of his stunts a man wouldn't believe till he seen 'em himself.

One of his tricks was a handicap match with the ace of spades as a target—and nobody barred. Peets would stand with his back to the target, and let his opponent stand facing the target, with his gun in his hand and pointed at the ground. A third party would fire a shot in the air, as a signal, then the first bullet in the black took the money.

Peets claimed he made his living that way. It looked like a cinch, and everybody that was any good with a gun had to have a try at beating him; but nine times out of ten Peets won. If the feller fired too quick he nearly always missed, and if he took any time at all to aim, Peets beat him to it—and Peets never missed. He was a bad actor with a six-gun, and no mistake. Everybody gave him a wide berth, and for that reason if Peets was pinin' for a fight he had to pick it. And that's what he did this time.

It was a pleasant evening late in May when it happened. Peets strolled into the Palace about nine and moped around easy-like for a spell, then set down opposite the Kid and bought a twenty-dollar stack of chips. He played along easy for a while, until a play come up that suited him; then he shoved in all his checks. The Kid hesitated; Peets set there, mouthing his cigar and glarin' up through his eyebrows at the Kid. It was a tense moment—everybody knew now, just from the looks of the man, that Peets was aimin' to pick a fight, and it sure looked bad for the Kid.

Pop Baldwin strolled over and stood lookin' on. His arms was folded, but I could see the end of a gun-barrel stickin' out from under his left arm. Pop wasn't no gun-man, but, whatever his faults might have been, he had sand. I'll say that for him.

The Kid finally called, and on the show-down the Kid won. Peets tossed his hand in the discard and got up, pushin' back his chair with his legs. He glared at the Kid for a spell, then spit a big gob of tobacco juice square in the middle of the table. The Kid pushed his chair back a little ways and tipped his hat farther back on his head. He never said a word; just set there smilin' up at Peets.

"You robbed me, you tinhorn," says Peets. "I saw you steal that card and drop the other one on the floor. Look under him, fellers, you'll find it layin' there."

Nobody knew just how it happened; but it's likely that Peets took a chance when everybody was watchin' the Kid rakin' in the pot, and flipped a card under the table, aimin' for it to land under the Kid; but the card must have struck the cash drawer and bounced back under Peets' chair. Anyway that's where they found it. Peets was stumped for a breath or two; but he got his wits back quick enough at that.

"You flipped it across, you —— sneak," he hissed.

The Kid leaned back and rested his hands on the edge of the table—palms down. His smile carried a sneer as his eyes traveled up and down Peets' long frame.

"You are a rotten liar," says the Kid, easy-like, but loud enough for everybody to hear.

Peets' right hand dropped to his gun, and everybody hustled out of line. The dancers lined up along the picket fence, and the music stopped. The Kid was about to be put to the acid test. Every man's hand was on his gun; there would be fair play, and Peets knew it. Knew that any little false move meant death—sure and quick.

Probably every person in the room thought the Kid had played his last game, that he'd never handle another card. It was too bad, but he was playing a man's game—he'd have to play it himself. The crowd would see fair play, but nothing more; Peets had only to play according to the rules.

The Kid kept his cash and chips in a drawer directly in front of him, and his extra cards in a drawer at his right. There was a block of wood in the right-hand drawer, on the side next the Kid, with a little piece of green billiard cloth on top of it, and on top of that lay the Kid's gun. A short-barreled Smith and Wesson .38, it was; a new gun, just out—a mighty wicked little weapon at short range. Peets knew of course exactly where the Kid kept his gun. Getting at it would be a mighty slow process, and Peets undoubtedly figured on a cinch. It would be like taking candy from a baby—all he had to do if the Kid went after the gun was to time his fire to catch him as he started to raise it. Peets' eyes gleamed. These killers—they got an itch to kill—it comes on to 'em like a drunkard's crave for whisky, and nothing would satisfy it but blood.

Peets had all kinds of time; he could show off without danger, so he stepped back a bit and made a great show of lighting a cigar.

The Kid's right hand crept slowly toward the drawer and presently pulled it open, but he made no move to get the gun. Instead of going for his gun he let his left hand drop to his knee and reached up with his right and fussed with his hat. I begun to think the Kid was going to fluke when it come to a show-down.

He shifted his cigar to the right-hand corner of his mouth, and that su'prized me. That made me think maybe the Kid was all right inside—if he'd been scared that cigar would have gone out. That's the way I figured it. But I was puzzled about him shiftin' his cigar to the right. Looked like if he had any idea of usin' that gun he'd keep his cigar on the left side, or throw it away. A man don't want any smoke in his eyes when he's going up against a six-gun, you know. I was puzzled, but I begun to have hopes; to think maybe the Kid had something up his sleeve.

Most of the crowd had made up their minds that the Kid was going to fluke, I reckon—he'd stalled so long—but I couldn't believe it a-tall. He shoved his hat back a ways, then pulled it on tight. Then he said—

"You came in here with the express purpose of picking a fight—I reckon—Mr. Peets?"

Peets threw his cigar away, but he didn't say nothing, and the Kid went on:

"I understand you are a very bad actor with a gun, Mr. Peets. I also hear that you have a habit of picking on boys of the tenderfoot variety, and kids from away down East.

"Did you ever pick on a woman, Mr. Peets? That ought to give a new kind of a thrill to a coward, and a four-flusher like you—I'm sure you would enjoy it."

Peets went white—like dirty chalk—a yellow, fishbelly white. He looked ghastly; standin' there, leaning a little forward, with his hands tense and fingers bent like bird-claws. A gust of wind swept in through the wide-open doors and flared the big lamps; a dog howled, away off somewhere; some one coughed; you could hear the men breathe.

The Kid's hand moved swiftly toward his gun, but turned back at the half-way point to shift his hat again. Peets half-drew with his right, then let the gun slip back. Peets was plainly getting nervous.

They eyed each other, Peets tense and silent, the Kid smiling and careless. It was plain the Kid intended to die as he had lived—smiling. His left hand seemed to be resting carelessly on his knee; his right flashed toward the gun, but turned again to his hat as before. Peets half-drew again, then let loose of the gun—and then it happened.

The Kid's left hand jerked up from below the table, and it held a cocked .38—a full twin to the one in the drawer. Peets drew with his right, and just as the gun cleared the holster the Kid fired. Peets' gun clattered to the floor; he waved a shattered hand frantically, spraying blood all around; then lost his head entirely and drew the other gun. The Kid fired again; the gun joined its mate on the floor and Peets waved his left hand with the thumb dangling by a thread of skin.

It took the crowd a moment or two to realize just what had happened—then there was a riot. Everybody yelled, the shrill cries of the girls mingled with hoarse shouts of the men, and even cold-blooded old Pop Baldwin howled like an Indian. They crowded around the Kid to shake him by the hand and pound him on the back, like a pa'cel of crazy folks—which they was.

The girls was all a-crying—now the danger was over; the Red Child tore her way through the crowd and threw her arms around the Kid's neck. The men was all laughin' and talkin' big and lettin' on like it was all a joke—just to hide their feelin's, you know. They was a hard lot, but they was *men*, at that. They'd fight at the drop of the hat, and do 'most anything when they was chasin' gold in big chunks, but after they got it maybe they'd give it all away in a day or a month and go out after more. I've seen it happen many a time. And the girls—well, they was bad—some of 'em anyway; but they had hearts in 'em—and feelin's—just like the rest of us; and in a time like this they showed it.

"Old Six-Hoss" Simpson, founder of the camp and official town drunkard—loved by everybody for what he *had* been—was the only one to keep his head. He picked up the guns and steered the bad-man out into the street.

SIX-HOSS piloted Arizona around to Doc Porter's office and helped doc patch him up, and after a while we see Arizona sneakin' past the Palace on the way to the Pioneer Hotel. He was one pious-lookin' Injun, if you want to believe me! He looked like he would walk away around a jackass rabbit if he met one in the trail.

Six-Hoss showed up at the Palace right away—he knew he was good for a whole pa'cel of drinks on account of helpin' patch up Peets, and Six-Hoss was always dry—as long as he could sit up and swallow. He let it be known that according to doc's judgment, and barring the loss of one joint from his left thumb, Peets would be good as ever in a couple of months or less.

Peets hid out for three-four days, then disappeared. Nobody knew where he went to, but we all knew the trouble wasn't settled yet; that Peets would be back again all in due time, and we knew he'd come specially to kill the Kid.

Peets simply could not let the matter stand as it was. Known far and wide as a killer, and proud of his record, he could not be expected to let it go as it looked. To be outwitted and humiliated by a mere boy could be nothing but gall and wormwood to a man of Peets' standing; he would have to come back and shoot it out, or hide out for the rest of his life.

The Kid had proved himself a long ways from being slow with a gun; still, nobody believed he could have won on his speed, for Peets was a marvel with a six-gun. The Kid had mixed in a little headwork, however, and had won by a big margin. He had carefully led Peets to expect him to try with his right, and Peets had banked on him doing it just that way. The Kid had taken him completely by surprize by drawing with his left, and Peets hadn't a chance.

Of course Peets had set into the Kid's game for the sole purpose of picking a row and killing him, and the Kid knew it. While Peets was busy plannin' an excuse for trouble, the Kid quietly got his other gun ready to use with his left hand, which he did by layin' it along his left leg and half under the table. Nobody, least of all Peets, knew the gun was there; so the surprize was complete. It was a perfectly fair trick, and one that would sure teach Peets a lesson. Next time there would be no showing off on the part of Mr. Peets; everything would be strictly on a business basis. and we all knew it.

Immediately after Peets disappeared the Kid palled up with Six-Hoss Simpson, which seemed strange, considering that Six-Hoss was the official town drunkard and the Kid seldom drank at all; and we all wondered what it meant. There was a lot of talk; but nobody, barring old Pop Baldwin, guessed within a hundred mile of the truth—and Pop talked mighty little with his mouth unless there was something in it.

Six-Hoss had been an expert cabinet-maker in his younger days, and after he lost his leg and had to quit drivin' stage he opened up a little shop and worked at his trade—once in a while, when he was sober enough—and for several days the Kid spent a lot of time in the shop. Then one morning Six-Hoss and the Kid carried a brand-new card-table into the Palace, and the Kid tells Pop that he's putting it in place of the old one—at his own expense. The old table was perfectly good yet; Pop smiled his cracked half-smile and rubbed his pitted nose.

"Superstitious fiddlesticks," he exclaimed disgustedly. "I thought you had more sense, Kid."

"Call it what you like," returned the Kid with a smile. "I've got a hunch, and that's all there is to it. I'll deal no more cards on a table that a dog like Peets has spit on; you can lay to that."

I watched Pop as he stood lookin' on while Six-Hoss and the Kid removed the nearly new billiard-cloth cover from the old table and stretched and tacked it fast to the new one. Pop's face wore a puzzled look, and I reckon mine did too. Why should the Kid, if he was superstitious as we had at first supposed, change tables and still use the same old cloth? He's cleaned the cloth, of course, but at that if there was any filth left it was in the cloth, not on the table. It got me, all right.

Pop still puzzled as he watched them put the new table in place and carry the old one out. Finally he strolled over to the bar and stood with his back to it with his elbows on the bar and one heel hooked over the foot-rail. He smoked thoughtfully for a while with his glance on the new table; then suddenly his eye lighted up, and he rapped his head sharply with his knuckles.

"Some Kid!" he muttered, half to himself. "I take my hat off to him, by ——!"

Then, suiting the action to the word, he took off his hat and called everybody up for a drink on the house. Pop knew, but he might as well have been an oyster, for all we ever got out of him, and we finally quit tryin'.

IT WAS a smoky day in mid-September, nearly four months after the Kid's run-in with Peets, when Six-Hoss Simpson, gray with two hundred miles of dust, dropped from a slow-moving freight outfit as it passed the Palace, and stumped in to the bar. Six-Hoss, for reasons which have nothing particular to do with this tale, was a privileged character anywhere in the Northwest. His drinks were free if he was broke; he rode free on the stage if there was room. When there wasn't he rode with the freighters.

Just now he was returning from one of his periodical trips to Portland, and the most important thing he had to report was that Arizona Peets was fully recovered, that he had recently killed a brash tenderfoot in the Dalles and might be expected back in Porcupine on the next stage.

Peets came in on the stage that same evening. He had supper at the Pioneer, smoked a cigar on the veranda after supper, then strolled over and stepped into the Palace. He was cold sober, for once, and looked as though he had been that way for some time. Also for once there was no tobacco-juice in his yellow-red, billygoat whiskers. In fact Peets was groomed, and everybody knew what for.

He drank a small beer at the bar, then strolled carelessly around looking on at the games. He dropped a dollar at the wheel, another at fairbanks, then walked slowly toward the door, bestowing a masked glance upon the Kid as he passed his table. Everybody knew what he had come for—that he intended to have it out with the Kid that night—and he was closely watched. Few believed the Kid could come out alive, for Peets was cold sober and alert, and would hardly be caught napping a second time.

Beyond question Peets was one of five or six men in the West at that time who were best at the six-gun game, and it certainly looked bad for the Kid when Peets finally secured the seat he wanted and sat down directly opposite the Kid. He bought twenty dollars' worth of chips, and the game went on quietly for some time; but we all knew that now it was only a question of minutes until things would begin to happen. There would be a killing within the hour, and the atmosphere was tense with that odd quiet that precedes certain gun-play.

It looked bad. The Kid had shrewdly outgeneraled the gunman, before, but this time Peets would be forewarned and would take no chances; and beating the incomparable Peets at his best was unthinkable. Peets also had the advantage of the offensive, always a matter of prime importance whether two men are concerned or two millions. Peets' mind was made up to kill; he wanted to kill; the Kid would kill only when he was forced to it, and that's a serious handicap.

The game went on quietly, and it was perhaps half an hour before a play come up that was to Peets' liking. There were five in the game, which was draw poker, and the Kid was dealing. The player at his left passed; the next player passed; Peets made a substantial bet; the next player passed, which brought it around to the Kid. He raised Peets; the next two tossed their hands in the discard. Peets raised back; the next player tossed in his cards; the Kid called.

Then Peets pulled an old trick. It isn't a trick that can be put across with experienced players; at the same time the cheat can not be proved at the moment without counting the discard. Peets knew that the Kid would see it; that the others would see it and the Kid would be compelled to call him down, and that was precisely what he was after.

Peets accordingly called for three cards, and when they were dealt he discarded *one*, in such a manner that no one could tell whether he had discarded one or three. Neither could the cards in his hand be counted when held in the manner peculiar to expert poker players.

Of course the Kid could count the discard and insist that Peets spread his cards face down on the table to be counted; but that was not the custom. Instead the game would continue as usual until the showdown; then the Kid would claim the pot because Peets held a foul hand.

Now ordinarily the discard would be left where they lay, near the stakes in the center of the table, and Peets' plan was to drop two of his cards face down behind his right hand as it rested on the table in front of his chips, then slide them into the discard under the heel of his hand as he shoved in a stack of chips. Of course, even when as skilfully done as Peets could do it, it was a trick that any alert, experienced poker-player would be sure to detect; at the same time, the cards once mixed with the discard, it was mighty easy to deny it if accused

Peets figured that the Kid would be sure to call him down, and that would give him a plausible excuse for starting the thing he had come to pull off. There would be a few words, then smoke; and Peets planned to make all the smoke—this time.

The Kid eyed Peets for a moment, then shoved in a stack of chips and without waiting for Peets to act quietly gathered up the discard and placed them on the bottom of the deck. Peets knew he was caught; realized all at once that he was up against cool, shrewd brains, and for the first time began to doubt the outcome.

The Kid's move was wholly unexpected; and all Peets' carefully laid plans would have to be revised, and revised under fire—so to speak—with his life as the forfeit; for he knew that this time it would not be his hands that would stop the flying lead. Peets was completely stumped for the moment, and to gain time to think he pretended to be carefully studying his hand. The crowd was hostile; he was in bad, and he knew it. The foul hand could not be got rid of; it fairly burned his hands and sapped at his nerve. He might pass and tear up his hand, pretending rage and disgust; or he might pass and wait till the Kid raked in the pot, then pass his cards, carefully put in order, to the next dealer when he took the deck. He had set into the game for the express purpose of picking a row; but he planned to do it with some show of justice, and he had no stomach for getting caught red-handed in a rank cheat. Furthermore, in a case of this kind, some outsider might take a crazy notion to plug him.

It was a delicate situation. He hadn't the slightest excuse for starting anything—that was the rub—and the Kid had him foul. Only one thing was certain—he simply could not back down now.

The Kid caressed his chin and smiled across at the bad-man, and that decided Peets. He shoved back his chair and rose to his feet, snarling and tearing up his cards as he did so. The other players sprang up and stepped well out of the line of fire. Peets hesitated, plainly undecided what to do next.

The Kid removed his cigar from his mouth and blowed a puff straight at Peets. It was a plain challenge, and the crowd smiled its approval. Peets flushed to the ears. The Kid had beaten and humiliated him in their former encounter, and now he had trapped and outwitted him again; put him in bad with ridiculous ease.

The Kid's contemptuous smile maddened him; his rage mounted; he lost his head entirely. He stepped back a pace and kicked his chair over, then howled a foul imprecation straight at the Kid.

Peets adopted the gunman's crouch, leaning slightly forward with knees a little bent, his hands near his gun-butts, his fingers spread and bent like bird-claws, alert, every muscle tense, watching like a hawk the Kid's left hand. The Kid shoved back an inch or two and rested his left hand on the table, with his thumb beneath the edge. He shifted his cigar well to the left and tilted it up to keep the smoke out of his eyes, then let his right hand stray near the drawer that contained his gun.

It was a tense moment; one or both would be sprawling dead on the floor within the minute, and everybody knew it. There is a thrill in a cock-fight or a dog-fight, a greater in a fist-fight between two powerful and determined men; but two men facing each other, with a killing certain, is something else again. There is a peculiar suspense, an atmosphere not quite like anything else in the world.

A belated freighter passed, his three wagons clack-clacking, the trace chains of twelve sets of heavy harness rattling musically; a stranger stepped through the wide-open door, took a step or two toward the bar, then froze in his tracks. A fine mist of dust floated in on the evening breeze, bearing the acrid smell of hot axle-grease and leather and sweating horses.

Peets, fully recovered from his nervous spell now that things had come to a showdown, stood tense and glaring, ready for the Kid's slightest move, watching the Kid's left hand with unblinking eyes. The Kid's hand slipped nearer and nearer to the drawer and his gun. The clacking and chain-rattling died away, and ceased as the freighter turned a near-by corner.

SIX-HOSS SIMPSON, when the row began, stood drinking at the bar with a tall, hatchet-faced, slim-fingered man who wore horn-rimmed glasses with thick lenses. The slim man looked like a tenderfoot, which he emphatically was not. He was "Professor" Irwin, editor and proprietor of *The Porcupine News*, a weekly paper which was famous for its polysyllabic English, hence the "Professor" handle to his name.

The Professor was a college man, and his friendship for the illiterate Six-Hoss came about through a mutual respect for a "shandygaff," which is old-time Western idiom for a glass of beer spiked with a man's size drink of whisky.

They turned, with their drinks in their hands, at the first signs of a row, and stood with their backs to the bar. The Professor had the detestable habit of going about at all times with his mouth open. He looked scared—and wasn't.

"Ambidextrous," murmured the professor as he eyed Peets' hands hovering near his gun-butts.

"Andy—what?" demanded Six-Hoss.

"Ambidextrous," replied the Professor. "Or, in language addressed to your understanding, Six-Hoss; handy with both mits. The Kid hasn't a chance—not the ghost of a chance—and it's too bad! He's a good kid and——"

"Andydexter is right," Six-Hoss interrupted, "and my money goes on the Kid—yet!"

"Drinks?" queried the Professor.

"Drinks goes," agreed Six-Hoss.

"Done," finished the Professor.

The Kid's left hand moved swiftly, but very slightly, merely sliding an inch or two along the table. Peets' hands flashed to his guns; the Kid smiled. Peets' hands moved away from his guns; he got rid of his cigar by the simple expedient of opening his mouth and letting it drop. He blew a fragment of tobacco-leaf from his lips, and the slight sound, in the intense stillness, sounded almost like a shot. Then——

Nobody knew how it happened; nobody saw it done. One instant the drawer was tight shut, and the Kid's hands resting lightly on the table; then the drawer stood wide open and the Kid's gun was in his hand.

Peets drew both guns; the Kid fired. The sharp bark of the Smith & Wesson was followed instantly by the roar of a .45.

The .45 plowed its way through the table, two feet in front of the Kid; Peets, shot square between the eyebrows, took one step forward and fell face down on the table, then slumped to the floor, his other gun going off as he fell.

"Ambidextrous," murmured the Professor again.

"Ambidexter is right," agreed Six-Hoss. "Only—the Kid is ambidexter in the head, Professor. Drink up—you owe me one and I'm dry like a fish."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the Professor as he finished his drink. "Too speedy for me, Six-Hoss; too speedy for me! I didn't get it."

"No-o-o-o?" drawled Six-Hoss. "Mebby I might he'p you, Professor. I built that table—there's a spring behind that drawer, and a left-hand button to let her go. Ambidexter, says you? You're right, Professor; but ambidexter in the head beats all the other kind plumb to ——. Fill 'em up, Charlie; the Professor loses."

The Land of Ophir

A Three-Part Story Conclusion

by Charles Beadle

Author of "The Brothers," "The Spell," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

ABOUT the first adventure I can remember was with Fraser H. Thorpe, back in early school-days. It lasted sixteen rounds, and left me with a feeling of permanent disgrace—because I'd thought of Frazer as a sissy, a student, a bug-chaser, and not good for anything except hunting beetles. And that shows how wrong a man can be!

My name's Tromp, by the way.

What he did in the world I don't know. My luck took me with other men. And the prince of them was Billy Langster, one of the wildest who ever hit the Barbary Coast. But Billy disappeared—to become respectable, I understood; while I found myself trekking through the big thirsts in Africa with an Africander named Ollendorff.

We wandered all over the shop from Bulawayo to the Nile, where old Ollendorff kicked in—or, rather, was gored out by a buffalo. The last I recall of Ollendorf was when we ran into the *safari* of a Levantine who called himself Gandy, somewhere northwest of Lake Albert Edward. Gandy was beating up a woman with a *sjambok;* so we beat him up instead—and left him cursing us in languages we couldn't recognize and could treat with contempt.

The Mahdi got me shortly after this and kept me in a cage for a couple of years, dangling from dromedaries' backs in the eastern Sudan.

When I got free I settled down—and, to make quite sure, I got married.

Fate dealt me another hand a few years later, when I found myself a widower, alone, smoking a pipe in the lobby of a New York hotel. One night I went down into the old Tenderloin looking for some excitement with Hardwicke, a young Englishman I'd picked up in Mexico. And we found it. When the fight was over, Hardwicke—between drink and gratitude—spilled the beans about an expedition that was on foot for Africa.

Right away I horned in, and he introduced me to the leader. I took one look and recognized him.

"Billy!" So old Billy Langster gave me the dope first hand.

He'd been about everywhere! New York, East Africa—where he was very nearly scuppered by a gang who first worshiped him and then wanted to eat him—China, Peru, Brazil, and Africa again—Morocco, to be exact, where he tried his hand at making sultans.

This sultan business naturally brought him up with fat Johnny Starleton. Every one knows Starleton—he really *does* make sultans! Through Starleton, Billy met another regular fellow, Fieldmorre, an impecunious Irish viscount, who had a hunch of his own.

Between them they'd got hold of Sabah, a Syrian who had gone in with a syndicate some years before to exploit the territory back of Juby, just south of the Spanish line on the West Coast where the Sûs ends in the sea.

The syndicate had gone on the bum when an assistant funked his job, and the local sheik was made to pay damages by a British gunboat. But there were rich pickings there; and Fieldmorre took up where the old syndicate ended.

With Sabah he went inland and visited the Shareef Ma-el-Einen, ruler of the entire district. They made friends with the *shareef* and a Frenchman, Captain Vèron, who butted in while on an exploring-trip from Senegal.

Vèron warned them it was sure death to go farther inland; told of atrocities—missing men—and so forth. The latest relic was the journal of a man who had gone in and not come out. Vèron had got the book from a coast Fantee.

Well, when Billy gave me that line, I grinned.

"All right, you —— cynic," said he; and he produced the diary.

This diary-writing adventurer gave a pretty straight account of hitting inland to Nsonnafo's village; and from there on until he struck a city of "oriental magnificence" and met the sultan. Then he began to gibber about subphratries of the Snake Society—and sacrifices—and that was all. The account ended right there. It was —— interesting, but not conclusive. I turned the book over—and a name almost slapped me in the face:

FRASER HALDE THORPE

"*The Land of Ophir,*" *copyright 1922, by Charles Beadle.*

I told Billy, without any more palaver, that I was good for $20,000 for my share in the expedition. Where Frazy had gone I'd go!

We recruited our whites from men we'd known, and arranged for them to meet us at Funchal and Las Palmas, where we picked them up some months later on our own schooner, *Penguin*, and sailed for Juby.

But in Las Palmas we had a farewell roughhouse when our men got in a row that brought us the acquaintance of Baron Bertouche—known to the masses as Sid-el-Keleeb, a man who sponged on the whole world until he met Fieldmorre, who came near kicking him overboard.

Well, when we reached Juby we found all hands present, except Vèron, who sent a message that he would overtake us.

Ten days later then, two hundred and fifty strong—one hundred of these being fighting Hausas trained by ourselves at the butts with rifle and machine gun—we hit the long trail.

We found Ma-el-Einen all right, polite enough in his walled town, but kind of sore at us going any farther. Sabah, too, suddenly began to balk and get sullen for no reason we could see. And we got our first taste of the real desert when we picked up a dervish—a dirty, snake-swallowing, shrieking, blasphemous dervish—who gave our Hausas (half of 'em were Mohammedans; half were rank pagan) a real thrill.

After we'd gone about five days' march into the desert sickness began to break out. First it hit the dromedaries. Then the men caught it. When they began to cash in, the Hausas showed signs of funk. We couldn't figure it out. One day as I was talking it over with Fieldmorre a spasm took him and myself at the same moment.

"Fieldy," said I, "we've both got it."

We loaded up immediately with laudanum; and the next thing I remembered— Oh, ——, I don't remember anything.

We came to ten days later in wicker baskets slung from dromedaries.

The caravan was still intact.

Vèron had succeeded in joining us, after escaping from Tuaregs. If he hadn't joined us, —— knows what would have happened. He caught on right away that the dervish had been slowly poisoning the whole outfit, and punching holes in the waterskins.

"What—" I began.

"Shot 'm—*pronto*," says Billy.

But that didn't seem to settle things either, because he had put the fear of —— into the lot of the men. The morale was kind of shaken. Irritation and complaining began to break out. We all got the infection.

Some of us believed Vèron was double-crossing us in the interests of France; others thought Sabah's actions suspicious; and an undercurrent of resentment was soon threatening to disrupt us. Only one thing could have saved us. And it happened.

Camp was jumped at dawn by a whirlwind of Tuaregs.

We fell back into a square and gave 'em ——, beating them off after a good sharp scrap.

We knew now our Hausas could fight!

But we knew, too—and every passing hour confirmed it—that the unknown reaches before us held unguessed dangers and swarmed with terrible fighters.

And I couldn't forget the Mahdi!

THE action put the Hausas in good spirits, and next day we marched on.

In the morning camp was jumped again, and treachery broke out—the Mohammedans turning against us Christians, and the pagans uncertain of us both. It was a —— of a mess. The Tuaregs rode clean over us twice while we fought for the machine guns.

"Tromp," says I to myself, "this is the end of the trail."

But blamed if we didn't come up smiling, though we were hit hard. Only seventy Hausas were left fit. Four of the whites had been killed; two more were seriously wounded; and all of us had something to show.

On top of that we found the waterskins had been slit. It was enough to take the guts out of any man, but the only one to show yellow was Sabah. It was ten days to the next water, and he wanted to turn back.

We marched away in the dark.

The days that followed we went through ——. A lot more of the men pegged out. At last when we were just on the ragged edge we found water and a forest.

We camped for several days to get back our strength and morale. And here Famitty first found out our Hausas' fetish. Snakes!

That's straight. The snake was their totem, just as the bear and wolf are totems of some of the Indians.

Well, as soon as we struck that —— forest we hit trouble again. Poison darts. They got a lot of us, and poor Famitty cashed in. It began to look as if we couldn't push on any farther.

One day a message was shot into camp from Baranindanan, Sultan of Melle, telling us to beat it or take the consequences. Fat chance of us quitting at that point!

Well, we reached a small walled village, and Vèron went forward to investigate. That was the last we saw of Vèron!

We made sure of camp that night—every possible precaution. I made my rounds just before dawn.

As I was turning in one of the guards pointed out a monitor in the shadow. I took a step forward to have a better look at the big lizard—and I got mine!

When I woke up it was broad daylight; I was in a sack, shoved in a basket, hanging from the back of a dromedary. If you'd ever been in the hands of the Mahdi, you'd know I felt —— sick.

But they treated me decently enough, and after five days we arrived at Melle.

They let me rest and clean up a bit, then they brought me to the palace—into the ivory room where Nubian slaves stood on guard. There was a kind of a throne at one end, with a little dark man sitting there with a hood on his head. One look and I recognized the rotten woman-flogger—Gandy!

The swine actually put himself out to please me. Showed me about the palace—his gardens—a wonderful pool. This pool was full of pythons, and he called it the Sacred House of the Snake.

"I don't like snakes!" said I.

"Prejudice," says he with a leer. "That's all. You'll soon get used to 'em."

Well, —— if he didn't go on and tell me he was a direct descendant of Khammurabi, first King of Babylon, and now Emperor of Ophir—Reborn of the Snake.

"Good night," I muttered to myself. "That's going pretty strong for a dago."

Then he blew up! He didn't try to kill me right there, though he could have done it with his trained snakes; but he said he was going to half-crucify me with my friends and feed us to the pythons. And, by ——, I knew he meant it.

I was taken to comfortable quarters—free to move about because, I suppose, they figured we couldn't escape anyway—and there I found Billy and Fieldmorre. I gave them the dope.

That night we pulled off a little stunt with the sentries and got away, with two Martinis and a Snider. That is, we got away from the palace, but we were still in Gandy's town.

I still couldn't see how we were going to escape; but I swore by —— that Gandy and those pythons would never get me.

XVI

"I GUESS I feel more comfortable," commented Billy, patting his rifle. "But where to now? You know the lie of the land, Phil."

"Darned if I do. Only from the palace to that snake house."

"Well, hurry up," said Fieldmorre. "The sun's coming fast."

I took a hurried look around in the faint light of the dawn turning rose, and pointed to the left.

"Better get down these terraces to the lake level of the gardens, in the shelter of these trees, and work around to the forest over there."

We started off, making the most of the cover, and, hugging the wall of the lowest terrace, trotted along. We were about halfway toward what was evidently a wall, cutting off the town from the sultan's gardens, when we heard a distant yell. After that we broke into a lope, having to hold up our robes woman-fashion to get any speed on. There was some fifty yards of bare space from the corner of the gardens to the shelter of the trees, but fortunately it was in the darkest shadows of the eastern side.

As we halted for a moment to reconnoiter within the wood, we saw shadowy forms on the top terrace against the white of the palace building, scurrying about. Of course we couldn't have an idea where we were going. But the deeper the shelter the better.

We started on again. I had not gone far before I pulled up, ejaculating, "Oh, my ——!" for in a patch between the trees, making for us, was a gigantic python, its chromatic curves glistening in the faint light. Automatically I jerked up my rifle.

"Don't shoot, you blithering idiot!" exclaimed Fieldmorre, knocking it down. "You'll give us clean away!"

"But ——! The snake!" I expostulated.

"Get out of the light then, you poor fish!" snapped Billy irritably, and hustled me by the shoulders to the right. With my exaggerated fear of snakes I couldn't resist turning to see whether the reptile was following; but sure enough the holy brute was continuing on its way as if it had a date at sunrise.

As always in the tropics, the sun came up with a jump; but fortunately the trees grew denser at every step. Twenty yards farther on I nearly yelled as I nigh put my bare foot on one of those giant monitor lizards. The beast was about seven feet long and looked more like a crocodile. Not a dozen yards farther on I caught the gleam of another snake, a small one with white and green splashes.

"My ——!" I said to Billy. "I can't stand this place for long or I'll go plumb dippy! I'd rather face the music without."

"Aw, cut it," retorted Billy. "The darned brutes won't attack unless you put your big feet on 'em or something."

With the exception of the cobra which the Gandhi wore as a necklace, I knew this to be more or less true; but it didn't comfort me any. Every moment we had expected to meet a wall, as we had reckoned that we were enclosed in the sultan's gardens.

We stopped for several moments, listening intently. But no sound of pursuit could we hear.

We hurried on again for some hundred yards or so. Then came an exclamation from Billy, who was leading. Right in the middle of the forest, tangled with creepers and undergrowth, rose a wall some fifteen feet high.

"This is the garden wall then!" I exclaimed. "Guess we can mount by way of those creepers mighty easy."

"Here's a big gap," said Fieldmorre, slightly to my left.

As we hurried after him he added with astonishment:

"It isn't a wall! It's a ruin! Heavens, look at this!"

There were several slabs of stone standing in rows like tombstones in a churchyard, green and mostly covered with fungi. Billy started to hurry on, but Fieldmorre was scratching with the butt of his rifle.

"I say, come here, Tromp," he called to me. "Look at that."

In the patch cleaned up by him, deeply engraved in the stone but worn with time, were numerous marks.

"Steles undoubtedly," commented Fieldmorre. "Don't you think so?"

"Search me!" said I. "Looks like Egyptian hieroglyphics to me."

"No, no; they're older than that."

"Hey!" came Billy's voice, but in a subdued hail. "Where the —— are you? Here's a darned temple!"

We hurried on and found him in front of the ruined walls of what evidently had been a temple at some remote period. It seemed to have been a portico, for there were the remnants of pillars carved in stone to represent the convolutions of a snake. The side walls were down, with pieces of masonry beneath the undergrowth.

Right behind the pillared entrance, if such it had been, was a tree of enormous growth with vast branches which drooped to the ground and had taken root again. We explored behind it and found there more ruined walls. As I was forcing my way through the undergrowth I nearly let out a yell as what had seemed a bunch of brightly colored leaves suddenly uncoiled and faded away.

"Darned place is another snake house," I muttered disgustedly, and moved quickly in the opposite direction.

But I hadn't got three paces before the ground disappeared and I shot through the undergrowth until the creepers, catching my outstretched arms, held me suspended. Swearing, I began to wriggle, but finding I was slipping deeper, had to call for help. Billy came scurrying over, nearly kicked me in the face with his bare foot and promptly disappeared from sight altogether.

I heard a muffled and forcible exclamation as I shouted a warning to Fieldmorre, heading for the same fate. Advancing cautiously after he had spotted my head, he dragged me out. In answer to polite inquiry for Billy to tell his whereabouts, there came a fiery exhibition of language.

"What's the matter? Where are you?" we called softly.

"Where am I? How in —— should I know! Come and get me out, you —— slab of beef, instead of yawping there! The —— place is alive with adders and snakes and —— only knows what."

"Keep on swearing," I advised him. "It'll help to lead us to you."

He did. We located him beneath the undergrowth. By tearing with our hands we finally managed to reach his hands and drag him out, covered from head to foot in green stinking slime. Spluttering and snorting, he began to tear off his robes.

"But see here," said I, suddenly recollecting why we were there. "We can't stop for a bath, Billy, or those —— will be on top of us!"

"Can't help it," spluttered Billy, energetically wiping his face on a clean patch of the inside of his *silham*. "Anyway—why not—stop here? Good—place to hide or scrap—as—any."

"That's true," assented Fieldmorre. "We don't want to get too far away anyhow, in case we can get in touch with the other chaps."

"Glory!" I exclaimed, recollecting Gandhi's yarn. "Maybe they daren't come after us here? I mean, as they think these snakes are sacred—must not be touched or hurt— Get me?"

"That's right," agreed Billy, rubbing his beard in a handful of leaves. "Phoof! They've got darned good taste if they don't."

"But the snakes!" said I, suddenly seeing another point of view. "They'll drive me crazy!"

"Go to it, boy," said Billy callously. "And when we get back we'll put you in the yip house and they'll fix you fine."

"But seriously," opined Fieldmorre, "I'm sure we can't do better than stop here. I think that there's something in Tromp's idea of their not daring to come after us because of the holy serpents. They'll probably think that their gods have eaten us."

"Gandhi won't," I objected, thinking still of those darned snakes.

"Maybe not," returned Billy; "but it's more'n probable that he's taught 'em to keep away from tabu ground, and it'll take quite a while even for him to teach 'em not to mind. Come, you fellows, let's clear away some of this muck over there and make a cozy corner. Tonight we can go out and do a bit of scouting unless they turn up before."

We selected a corner of the ruined portico, and, pulling with our hands and using the butts of our guns, cleared a small space, enough not to harbor snakes and poisonous spiders too close to us. That didn't take long.

Then we decided we'd best scout around a little to see whether there were any signs of pursuers. Fieldmorre took the right, Billy the center and I the left, agreeing that at any sign of the enemy we should give the whistling wood-buck call. But before starting I pulled off my *silham* and jelab, for a fellow can't scout in a kind of nightgown. Fieldmorre followed suit and Billy had no need, having discarded the evil-smelling robes for just the trousers and shirt.

I made my way back to the thinning of the trees. I could hear the throb of drums and the wail of some instruments. Pressing on to the edge, I got a clear view over the lake. Across the water the long white palace, set on top of this kind of hanging terraces, with minarets and trees behind and about, surely did look fine in the glare of the sun.

I admit I had made a few détours, for my eyes got wonderfully keen on spotting the difference between just leaves and just snake; and the brutes, being pampered, must have bred like coyotes; and toward noon they mostly go in for a siesta, which makes the danger of stepping on them worse.

Then I thought of the obvious need of having water with us for the day, but hadn't a single thing I could utilize for a pail, not even shoes. Nor were there any big leaves, such as the plantain, out of which I could have made a leaky bucket. The only thing to do, I reflected, was to go without until we started out at night foraging for food.

On my return I found Billy squatting, with his back against a snake pillar, polishing with handfuls of grass and leaves at something.

"What on earth're you doing?" I exclaimed.

"Polishing the family plate, old dear. Jabbed my toe on it as I was scouting past that hole I fell into. Thought it was a piece of rock, which struck me as strange in this swamp, so I pawed around."

He handed me a thing that looked like a clumsy soup-tureen, but very heavy.

"It's Mr. Snake's milk-cup," he explained.

"Has a lot more of those curious characters we saw," added Fieldmorre. "I think that this place in ancient times must have been the temple of the snake-worship. Look at those twisted snakes on the lip sides upon a kind of pillar like a totem-pole; sort of caduceus, you know."

"But is it gold?" said I.

"Betcha," assured Billy. "Reminds me of that Phenician outfit. I always did have the luck."

"You'll need all you ever had to get out of this," I retorted. "What's the use of it here anyway?"

"Do splendidly for a drinking-bowl," said Fieldmorre.

"Drink!" I echoed. "Out of that snake thing? Ugh, I'd rather eat caterpillars, and that's going some, for I'd go plumb loco if I had twenty caterpillars put on my naked body."

"You'll probably have to if we don't get any grub tonight."

"You seem mighty fresh!" I retorted; for I know snakes and caterpillars—I think I'm more scared of caterpillars than snakes, which seems foolish, I'll allow—are my weaknesses; but I don't like being kidded about it.

"Sure," said Billy. "I've got a gun again. But seriously, there's no sense in the three of us scouting tonight. I'll go."

"You won't, by the Lord!" said I. "I'd rather be in St. Quentin than stop here all night with these beasts on the prowl. I'll go, I'm telling you, and come home with the milk and maybe some grub."

"But how about locating the other chaps?" interposed Fieldmorre.

We fell to discussing what had better be done. Billy was for waiting a day or two at least to let the excitement of our escape die down. Fieldmorre contended that the chances were that Gandhi would come trying to chase us out of the sacred wood. I suggested that maybe he wouldn't be able to persuade anybody but a holy man to come within a foot of the wood, and that, knowing we had rifles and ammunition, they'd find excuses for stopping outside.

"If that's right," said Billy, "then they'll just surround the place and try to starve us or drive us to a diet of boiled serpent."

"Ugh! Shut your head, Billy."

"I think the best thing," said Fieldmorre, "would be for the three of us to scout tonight. Maybe if one can get through and back we may get some food and an idea of the lay of the town."

"Won't get far in the town," said I. "For it'll sure be divided into quarters, with gates locked and barred, like all these Arab towns."

As far as we could figure out the position, it seemed a deadlock. Finally we decided to try it out anyway, and, drawing for watches, turned in for some sleep.

TOWARD sunset I, having the dog watch, began to get uneasy. When the cry of the Muezzin was wailing in the distance I awoke the other two.

"See here," said I. "Snicker your heads off if you like, but I can't stand for rubbing my nose against serpents in the dark. I'll be back at dawn if I'm still going."

And, refusing to listen to Billy's gibes, I went off, anxious to be out of that creepy, crawly world while I could see where I was stepping. As soon as I had arrived near the thin timber again I nestled into cover and waited for dark.

But just as the sun was setting in a blaze of scarlet I was glad I'd come, for I caught the mutter of voices not far away. I squirmed through the grass and bushes, dragging my gun cautiously. I heard a guttural click and a negro soldier said—

"Nay, O Fayami, not within the sacred wood, for indeed will our lords be wroth."

"But Sidna (our lord) hath given us magic against the hunger of the Holy Ones. Come, go, ye four, and if ye see the dirty infidels kill them for the glory of Islam!"

"Nay," grumbled another. "Thou art our superior; wherefore hangest thou behind?"

"What use?" demanded a third. "For have not the Holy Ones long since eaten them up? Is it not known that no one can live within the sacred wood?"

"Do my bidding, ye with livers of water. Hath not Sidna so commanded? Wherefore obey ye him not? Is he not *khalif* of our lord Mohammed—whom Allah bless—and is his power not mighty? Why fear ye?"

"Powerful he may be, but who is as powerful as the Holy Ones of the Wood, our sacred ancestors?"

"Ah," I chuckled to myself, Mr. Gandhi isn't as almighty as he thinks he is—mostly that way with kings, I guess."

And I reckoned I had been right—neither he nor any of his holy men had any stomach to try to chase us out of the wood, knowing we were armed; and the tabu of the older pagan cult was more powerful than any dispensation the veneer of Islam could give.

The men continued grumbling and arguing with their corporal, or whatever he was; but enter the wood they wouldn't. Probably files of them were all around the confines of the wood, so that Billy and Fieldmorre would surely bump against them too. Of Billy's scouting abilities I had no fear; but of Fieldmorre's I just didn't know anything. However, there was no sound of strife, so I reckoned that all was well so far.

I thought of trying to put over the ghost bluff, as I had a few vestas still in my *skarrah*; but on reflection it seemed to me that this time I'd surely get a bullet; for more than probably they had been put wise to the first bluff. The sun had set, and it was now dark, of which I was very much aware. My nose grew so keen that I thought I could smell snakes.

The bunch of guards were still in a heap, as I could tell from the sound of their voices. Presently I just caught one anxiously suggesting that they may as well go home, for the evil spirits of the night would never permit infidels to live.

"That's right, old son," I muttered, "and means anyway that you won't budge from where you are the night long."

I began to edge my way around to the right, and passed within ten yards, near enough to have potted some of them by the dim light of the clear stars on their woolen *haiks*. If only, I thought, I could drive one of those pythons or giant monitors on to them, I'd probably be able to collect the guns they'd left behind.

But just at this moment my left hand, feeling the way, touched something cold and slimy, jerking a muffled squawk out of me.

For a few moments I was too busy wriggling off in the other direction to pay much attention to what was happening. I stopped and listened. They'd heard me. I heard their man in charge violently ordering them to search around, maintaining that a man had cried out and not a bird or a demon as his men insisted. Then came the red flash and the report as one of his men fired blindly. The bullet shrieked over my head.

For a moment I was on the point of shooting, thinking that he'd spotted me. But maybe it was a fluke; and if so there was nothing to be got by proving eloquently that we were very much alive in the wood.

Then from all sides rose shouts and cries and the swish of running men. I determined that they were all on the outskirts of the wood, and concluded that I'd best get back, snakes or no snakes. Doubling up, I made a run for it. I reckoned that they hadn't seen me, for although a fusillade of shots sounded, none came anywhere near me.

Where the denser forest began I pulled up and listened. They were making enough noise to scare the holy serpents, shouting orders, yelling exclamations and firing at random. I waited until the uproar had died down, and noted that not a single brave had made any attempt to enter the wood. Then I heard a voice crying:

"Nay, nay, 'twas no infidel but a jinnee! Stop your firing lest we anger him!"

"As long as you keep that idea in your nut," thought I, "I'm content."

However, now they'd probably sit in a bunch on the outside of the wood between me and the town. I'd either have to sit here or go back. I didn't like either proposition; but finally, screwing up my courage, I decided to return and await Billy and Fieldmorre as best I could. Anyway I'd feel, I reckoned, less uncomfortable in the little corner we'd cleared than here in the dense undergrowth.

I crept and crawled for some time with reluctance, just hating to keep my face on a level with a snake's, and then, growing reckless, I stood up and began to crash blindly through the wood. Every time a damp creeper hit me on the face or hand I'd have a hard job not to yell. Whether snakes are given to swinging their tails from trees at night I couldn't recollect, nor did I ever know whether I encountered half a hundred snakes on that trip or none at all.

I had got, I reckoned, about half-way when something brought me up with a jerk—a curious wailing, dismal and plaintive. I listened. I couldn't make out what it could be. But it seemed familiar. A curious sound, like a beast whining and yet rising and falling in a weird lament.

So interested was I that for the moment I forgot the snakes and began again to scout along. As I grew nearer I realized that the noise must come either from or near the ruins where we were encamped.

I reached the ruined wall and peeped over. The wailing seemed to rise right underneath me. I climbed cautiously around, taking cover from place to place. Then I stopped with a gasp.

In an open space within ten feet of the portico where we had camped, was a shrouded figure, and around him quite a dozen pythons, whose dancing necks I could see shimmering and glinting in the starlight. My one impulse was to bolt. But I held fast and mastered myself. Then I said to myself with a gasp.

"Of course I know that darned row. It's the Gandhi himself who's making it with that reed thing. My ——! What a chance!"

The next impulse was to shoot. I brought down my rifle and reasoned:

"That's no earthly. I'll hold him up and make him prisoner; then we can dictate terms, —— his eyes!"

Then the serpents struck my eye again. I shuddered; I couldn't help it. What if Gandhi turned them on to me?

For maybe two minutes, although it seemed to me an hour, I had to beat myself into doing what I planned, and I want to say that if ever I was a hero in my life it was right there. With my dry tongue scoring the roof of my mouth, and a feeling that I'd eaten half a ton of bad lobster, I crawled nearer—as near as I dared, to tell the truth, to those dancing snakes, while the wailing and whining continued. Then, dragging my eyes from the serpents to draw a bead against the light of his robes, and steadying my rifle comfortably on the top of a stele, I swallowed hard and called out clearly—

"Put your hands up, Gandhi, or I'll drill you!"

And I repeated it quickly in Arabic.

The music ceased. The robes fluttered and the hands rose.

"Now send those —— things away; and if you turn 'em on me I'll plug you before they get me."

"They go, sir," came a voice from the figure, which seemed less silky than I had remembered.

As he spoke, the heads of the filthy beasts sank down and they began to glide away. One brute seemed to make direct for me, and had my prisoner known the agony I went through until it had passed me—within two feet as if unconscious of my presence—he would have surely and successfully made a dive for freedom. When I was satisfied that the serpents had gone I went over to him, calling—

"Now, don't move a limb!

"Now, Gandhi, I guess we'll talk different," I began as I stopped to run my hand over him for a gun, and stopped. I saw faintly beneath the shadow of his *silham* a wispy gray beard, and the bandaged stump of the little finger on his left hand.

"For the love of ——!" I exclaimed. "Sabah!"

"Yes, sir," he responded suavely. "I am Mohammed Sabah!"

XVII

"BUT what the ——'re you doing here?" I demanded.

"I come here to practise with the snakes, Mr. Tromp," Sabah replied.

"Practise with the snakes! For the Lord's sake, 're you a darned snake juggler, too?"

"I used to be many years ago, Mr. Tromp."

"You did, huh? But see here, what d'you mean by playing the traitor? That Gandhi fellow says you were betraying us to him all the time. Is that true?"

"In a manner of speaking, sir."

" 'In a manner of speaking!' D'you know I ought to shoot you on sight?"

"That is not usual with gentlemen, sir, without investigation," replied Sabah calmly.

I stared at him for a moment, unable to realize that he was not Gandhi. Somehow I didn't feel angry with him, and vaguely recollected Fieldmorre's apology for him—that he had been tortured between his conscience and his religion. Yet he seemed curiously unafraid and self-confident; apparently he had lost entirely the melancholy that had made him look like a sick buzzard.

"Get up," I ordered him, "and walk straight ahead to that ruined pillar there. And don't try to run or I'll put a bullet in your back."

"Certainly, Mr. Tromp. I am very pleased to see you."

"The —— you are!" said I. "Get along."

He rose as sedately as ever and slowly marched ahead of me to the pillar indicated.

"Now halt. Got any guns? Hold up your hands again."

He obeyed docilely, and I ran my hand over him and in his *skarrah.*

"Now sit down there and give an account of yourself."

"Where, please, is Lord Fieldmorre?" he demanded as he complied.

"Out scouting for food. He'll be back presently. Now if you want to keep a whole skin just sit up and answer questions. Where are Vèron, Hardwicke, the doc and the others?"

"In the city, sir."

"All together and safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you heard anything about another white man—Thorpe, you know, who wrote that diary?"

"No, Mr. Tromp."

"Well, why did you betray us to this Gandhi?"

"In a manner of speaking, Mr. Tromp, I could not help myself; and again that is a long story."

"Is that so? Well, I guess it's a long night, so get busy with it."

"If you don't mind, sir, I prefer to explain to Lord Fieldmorre."

"I advise you to get along with the yarn if you have one and not quibble-quabble about it."

"Quibble-quabble, sir?"

"Never mind that," I snapped. "Why don't you want to tell me?"

"Because I don't like you, sir."

I laughed in spite of myself.

"What have I done to deserve that?" I asked, amused.

"That I prefer not to say, sir."

"Well, cut that and do as I tell you."

"You may force me because I value my life extremely, sir, but who but Allah may know whether I may lie to you?"

Again I laughed at the naive statement; and, having started to laughing, I felt inclined to humor him. And anyway his last remark was more than probably correct.

"All right," said I. "I'll leave it to Lord Fieldmorre. He engaged you, so I guess he's more responsible than I am."

"Thank you, sir. I have always been polite to you because you were Lord Fieldmorre's friend."

"That's all right. Now shut up and don't try to get away, that's all."

"I won't, sir, as I wish to see Lord Fieldmorre. You may trust me."

"Like —— I will," I growled. "Lord!"

I muttered to myself. "I wish I dared to smoke!"

"You may, sir," Sabah informed me quietly.

"What? Who the ——"

"I mean, sir, that no one will disturb you even if you light a fire here. This is sacred ground. No one dares come except an infidel or the Gandhi himself."

"That's what I thought," said I, fumbling for my one packet of cigarets in my *skarrah.*

But as I was about to light it I stopped. Was this a trap? A signal to some one? I didn't trust Mohammed Sabah at all after that deliberate treachery which he calmly admitted—"in a manner of speaking." He was a wily bird and just slick enough to play his way out again.

"I wish Gandhi would," said I.

"So do I, sir."

"You do! Why?"

Just then a familiar voice said close to my ear—

"Who's that with you, Tromp?"

"Hullo, Fieldy," said I, turning, but not deranging the direction of my rifle. "Sabah, if you darn well please! Caught him piping the snakes just the same as the Gandhi."

Fieldmorre's bulk limped out of a shadow of the pillar.

"Sabah? Ah, yes! Had a little scrap and my leg went back on me," said he quietly, turning to me. "I'm bleeding like a stuck pig. You might see if you can readjust the bandage; will you, Tromp?"

"But, your lordship—" began Sabah.

"I'll talk to you in a minute," said Fieldmorre over his shoulder.

"Here, strip that into lint, quick," I ordered Sabah, tossing him a discarded *silham.*

Then I got busy on Fieldmorre. His Moorish pants were soaked with blood; so, taking a chance, I struck a vesta and sopped the wound as well as possible.

"Heard a —— of a racket," he commented as I was binding him up. "Was that your affair or William's?"

"Mine," said I, and explained why I was back.

"Now you, Sabah," said he when the job was finished.

Sabah began a long-winded apology for having to do what was "most repugnant."

"I don't want any of that, Sabah," said Fieldmorre curtly. "If you've got anything to say, say it. Recollect that the usual penalty for treachery is a bullet."

"But in a manner of speaking, my lord, I am not guilty."

"—— your manner of speaking," retorted Fieldmorre, and added, "in the double sense. Just say what you've got to say, and that quickly."

"Very good, Lord Fieldmorre," replied Sabah with a tone in his voice I surely had never heard before. "I will endeavor to explain at great length that you may possibly understand my peculiar and exalted position."

"—— cheek!" I heard Fieldmorre mutter. "Go on then."

SABAH raised his head toward the stars until the light just caught the end of his nose, as if seeking inspiration, or looking for spiders, which was what I was doing, and, arranging his robes on the pedestal of the ruined column as delicately as a woman at a tea-party, he began:

"I want you to know, my lord, that you have always been deceived regarding my nationality. I have been Syrian because ignorant modern people would fail to comprehend. My name is Thabit ibn Kuna and I am really Aramean, which perhaps your lordship knows is one of the oldest races in the world. I was born in Aram Zobah. At the age of five years I could read and write Aramaic, Syriac—which is a dialect—and Arabic, and was well versed in the Aramaic sacred writing, which, except in manuscript, does not any longer exist, and the Koran as well. At twelve years old, my lord, I was acquainted with what you call your European languages, four of them. Since the conquest by the Romans of my country—about thirty years, my lord, before your prophet Christ—my family declined in importance. The decline began from a petty jealousy of the Roman proconsul at Antioch on the refusal of the hand of a beautiful member of my family. And at the time at which I was born I regret to say that my father had sunk so low as to be a common cobbler.

"This regrettable position was to my beautiful mother a thorn of surprizing painfulness, and from my earliest adolescence she taught me who I was. This too became a surprizing thorn to me, so that it hurt so extremely that when I was but at the tender age of thirteen, I was driven to leave my country. As I had no other means of obtaining an outlet I prayed to Allah and to those who surround us this night, and was drawn to an old man carrying a bag of gold, and with the aid of much skill and a knife I agreed to take the money so that I might be free and undetected.

"By Assuan I met a holy man who was a charmer of snakes; but I was the son of my mother, who was a priestess of the ancient Aramaic religion—of which I may not tell you, my lord, for you are not of the brotherhood. So it was that the snakes knew me, and in the eyes of the vulgar I was a snake-charmer. But he was bad, my master, the holy man, and jealous, so that he stole the snakes which I had trained, and all the money.

"I did not see him for many years, and then he died. But I had become a guide and prospered a little. Thus it was, my lord, that I came to Europe, knowing your languages. And many things."

"You sure did," I muttered.

"I dwelt in your city of London some great time; but I was not successful, for it was cold and much rain, and your laws are not as our laws. I went back to the Levant, to Egypt; and I became donkey-boy at Alexandria, but this was a part of too much exercise. When I was sixteen—shame be upon me—I forgot my mother and my most beautiful country and who I was, and married a woman of no importance.

"Many children came, and much food and things were required; so, gathering wisdom as I went, I collected a sum of money again and gave it to help my wife and left her quickly so that I might go to Morocco. And in Tangiers I met a man, a Scotchman, and having no money, for I am honest, I went with him as interpreter to Cape Juby.

"My lord knows my history with that Scotchman and with the company he made. I worked hard for them, but Allah had not put wisdom in the heart of the young man they left with me. But indeed I worked hard and was surprizingly honest."

"I believe you," I murmured, but he didn't hear me.

"But when I left them my heart was low. Something had gone out of me. Europe, my lord, has a strange effect upon us Orientals. In some way the strength to do is taken away as the sap from a tree. Thus it was that for years I lived and toiled in terrible ways, forgetting my forefathers and the wisdom of my hand and faith. Thus perilously I descended into frightful punishment where you, my lord, found me as a teacher of Arabic in London, already an old man stricken with poverty and with no faith in Allah nor any god, slinking like a small dog through the Strand.

"I was full of gladness to work with my lord; for he lifted up my heart to be with a man of race, although but for a few hundred years."

I caught a glimpse of a twinkle in Fieldmorre's blue eyes in the star-glow.

"And I was surprizingly faithful to you, my lord, watching over your interests as if you were a man of my own ancient blood. Is that not so, my lord?"

"Yes, you were certainly very faithful and diligent," assented Fieldmorre. "That is what surprized me the more by your disgusting treachery."

"I, too, am more extremely surprized," stated Sabah solemnly; "but I am extremely confident that your lordship will find me in a manner of speaking not guilty."

"Not guilty!" I exclaimed. "Considering that seven whites were killed!"

"Wait a minute, Tromp," urged Fieldmorre. "Let's see what he has to say."

"I thank you, my lord. You have understanding and a large heart, which I shall not forget. If I may be permitted to remark, your lordship would have been captured and slain by the Baron Bertouche had I not interfered in a most surprizing way. Is that not so, my lord?"

"I suppose so, —— you. Go on."

"With great pleasure, my lord. I will now come to the time when your lordship with Mr. Langster journeyed to see Ma-el-Einen—I beg your lordship to remember that up to that experience I had sunk so low as to forget my race and my gods.

"When your lordship had read the diary of the lost white man and consulted with me, I was much rejoiced, for truly it seemed to me that in my old age I should gain gold and return to Aram Zobah, I the lost son of my beautiful mother, and if it so please Allah to raise a most surprizing monumental temple to house the last of the sacred Aramaic manuscripts of which my beautiful mother, the priestess, is the holy keeper. But Allah decreed that you should leave me and go away.

"And I talked much with the *shareef* Ma-el-Einen, who is a surprizingly holy man. And he caused me to feel my wickedness, and spoke of my mother and my race.

Then he gave me a message and a sign.

"The message told me to go unarmed and unafraid to the country which you, my lord, were seeking, and I said to myself that there I could make many surprizing discoveries, for by the sign he had given me I knew that I was safe from all danger. I came, and I saw the man who calls himself sultan; and he spoke much, telling me who he was and from what race he came. He spoke surprizingly much."

"Again I believe you," I muttered.

"And he took me here," Sabah continued, "where we sit in the night among the holy ones; and when I saw the column upon which I sit, I fell upon my knees and wept exceedingly, and my faith came back to me like sunlight upon the beautiful flower-face of a woman."

"Why?" interposed Fieldmorre.

"Patience, my lord; I will tell you all, that you may know my peculiar and exalted position. Has my lord deigned to remark upon the writings upon the monuments here?"

"Yes, I have. Some form of ancient Arabic, aren't they?"

"No, my lord; they are the lost tongue, Aramaic. The place where Allah has led your profane feet is the ruins of the temple of El, which means in English, the Snake, the Father of Men, the Begetter of All, a temple made more than sixteen centuries before your prophet Christ."

"But how on earth could that be?" queried Fieldmorre. "The Aramean, as you say, couldn't have been settled in Africa at that date?"

"What do you know, you blind men of Europe?" demanded Sabah with a sudden touch of ferocity in his voice. "No, you are ignorant, my lord," he continued quietly. "For your race can only feel blindly at signs. By the peoples of your kind, Roman, Christian and Mohammedan, was all the Aramaic literature of surprizing wonder destroyed, save that one manuscript in the keeping of my mother.

"What can your clever men tell of sixteen centuries before your prophet Christ'? What do they know of that the men of Islam destroyed in their pigful rage?"

"But," said Fieldmorre, interested, "why do you say 'pigful' about Mohammedans? Aren't you one? You're always calling on Allah."

"I am of the true brothers of Islam. Do you not know my lord, that Allah—the very name—was stolen by Mohammed? That Allah was the name of the god of what you call the pagans in Arabia? Ten thousand years before Mohammed was smitten by Aiësha, *we* were rulers of the world! They, destined by Allah—the true Allah—were our subject slaves, and in Africa were many what you call colonies. This have I read in the sacred manuscript, keeper of which is my holy mother."

Sabah paused and mumbled to himself in a tongue neither of us could understand. A cricket was making an ear-splitting noise close by, but I hadn't noticed it until then; and my hand touched some hairy monster on my knee which I shook off mighty quick, yet queerly enough without any conscious sense of horror as usual.

"And when my eyes rested on these things," continued Sabah, "a great big spirit descended upon me. I looked on the Gandhi and I saw my ancient enemy—this Gandhi, whose ancestors were the conquerors of Babylon before the time of Solomon, as you call him, by treachery took the daughter of the King of Aram Zobah to concubine, of whom, though he knows it not, this Gandhi is the descendant. This I know according to the Aramaic scriptures. Here upon the sacred spot, the place of the city of the queen of Sheba."

He pointed a hand toward the shadows of the ruins.

"There, within the temple upon the holy monument above the sacred black stone, is written the history of her reign. There stood a man of surprizing shameful blood, yet a kinsman to me. And I knew that Allah had destined what I should have to do.

"I did not reveal myself to him, else he would want to have me put to death, just the same of course as I would have him. He called to me to be faithful to him, obeying without question. This man of shameful birth made big oaths by the holy ones whom he does not understand; for who should know the secrets of a Druse? He, a follower of Mohammed, and knowing nothing of the incarnation of the great God Darazi, last of the incarnations of Allah, the ancient and the true god; he, boasting that he was the descendant of world king to me of the same family as she who ruled upon this spot, Sheba, of the tribe of Sabah, of the family of Thabit ibn Kuna, whose ancestors were Abgar

Ukkama, the first king of Aramea and Kil-Garthe daughter of the Pharaoh!"

He had paused with one hand raised, probably in some mystic sign; and his eyes, beneath the hood, seemed kind of luminous.

"Go on," said Fieldmorre placidly. "What then?"

"What then, my lord?"

For a moment Sabah stared blankly as if trying to pry himself out of the trance he'd got himself into.

"I covered myself with shame; for I lied to him, the man who called himself the Gandhi, and deceived him. I promised to do all that he commanded. I returned to Ma-el-Einen to await your lordship."

"Evidently," assented Fieldmorre coldly. "But why did you trouble to wait for me?"

"There was much to do. Many plans and much thinking to be done. I determined that no harm should befall you, my lord."

"That was very thoughtful of you, Sabah," said Fieldmorre sarcastically; "but will you kindly explain how you neglected to protect my white friends who have fallen? And also ourselves for that matter, left prisoners in the hands of this blighted—er—cousin of yours?"

"My lord does not understand. Before harm could have come to him I, Thabit ibn Kuna, the surprizing son of the great king Abgar Ukkama——"

"Yes, yes," snapped Fieldmorre. "But that's no excuse for treachery."

"Treachery!"

There was a new tone in his voice, a snarling one. I kicked Fieldmorre.

"That is not possible for one of the family of Thabit ibn Kuna."

"Well, Sabah?"

"I was about to inform you, my lord, that within a few days the person of shameful birth shall be no more, and I, Thabit ibn Kuna, shall be the Sultan Abgar Ukkama, King of Sheba and Ophir, and of all the gold and ivory, men and women, that I may build again this mighty temple to the great god, El!"

In the hot silence came the wailing cry of the muezzin—

"*illa 'illa hwa Moh-ammed er ras-ul al-lahi-i-i——*"

"Glory!" I thought. "Here's another of 'em."

But I had got an idea.

"I quite believe that, Sabah," said Fieldmorre presently in a soothing tone. "But what do you propose to do for us?"

"Your lordship, who has been my friend and companion, shall not want for anything," replied Sabah in what you might call an inspired voice.

"'Scuse me butting in, Fieldmorre," said I; "but I reckon you and I ought to talk this over with Billy before—you get me?"

"I think you're right, Tromp," he agreed. "Do you hear, Sabah? I'll have to talk the matter over with my friends. Do you understand that?"

"Your lordship is in the hands of Allah!" retorted Sabah; and, rising, he remarked, still in the spooky voice, "If my lord will excuse me, I will pray."

"Lord!" I commented as he faced the east in the first attitude of prayer. "He's off. But I'll keep a gun on him all the same!"

XVIII

"HE'S as mad as the Gandhi," said I to Fieldmorre after we had withdrawn a distance to allow Sabah to pray in peace.

"Possibly," said he; "but he believes it."

"Sure he does," I agreed, "because he wants to. But I don't trust him."

"Oh, yes, I do. Otherwise he wouldn't have come here and allowed you to capture him."

"Bull!" said I. "He wants to use us, and that's all there is to it."

"But I've known him longer than you have, Tromp. And——"

"Sure you have; and what did he do with you? No. He calls it the great god El, and the Gandhi, the great god something else; but all it amounts to is just gold. What's the good of talking, Fieldmorre? We came after gold. Gold turns all men's heads. Let's see to it it doesn't turn ours. The complaint's older than—than the guy says his family is.

"My idea is this. He wants to use us. Let him—as long as it suits us. That's about our only way out that I can see. Work him to get our men free. Then maybe we can talk a bit; but as it is—well, I guess we're just mud."

Fieldmorre didn't seem to like the blunt way I put it.

"Glory," I thought, "he's just kidding him along and he wants to fall for the snob stunt. ——, I've got the old admiral, but that don't keep me awake o' nights."

"Probably you're right, Tromp," began Fieldmorre, "although one hates to think——"

A wailing "All-ah" was shot to pieces by the sharp crack of a rifle. We listened, my gun on Sabah, who hadn't turned a hair, or, rather, altered his gymnastic performance. Came a distant yell and erratic rifle-fire, which echoed across the lake into the murmuring silence.

"That's Billy coming home," said I with confidence. "I'll bet he's with me."

"Possibly," assured Fieldmorre. "You see it's rather difficult to realize that a man who has served one so well and faithfully is not *au fond* faithful to you."

"You're an optimist," I argued politely, meaning to say an Englishman with a reluctant idea. "Anyway I'm not disguising that he may stick to you, but he isn't any great shakes for Billy and me. If you ask me, he's half-drunk now, and as soon as he gets the darned sultan's job he'll be as crazy as the other Gandhi guy. They all go that way."

"I still don't think you're right, Tromp. I know the man and you don't."

"—— you know the man!" I retorted a trifle shortly. "You knew him so darned well that he betrayed us from the beginning to the end. I say, use him just the same as he intends to use us."

I felt more than a bit sore. I saw clearly enough that at the beginning Fieldmorre had been inclined to be just as rough with a traitor as I would have been myself. But the wily Sabah had just laid on the butter as thick as he knew how—until he kind of ran away with himself. But anyway it had been enough apparently to draw Fieldmorre. Maybe the "my-lord" business had got on my nerves; and perhaps, too, the deliberate way Sabah had snubbed me right along had made me mad.

Maybe I was as wrong from one point of view as he was from the other, I thought. But that's the way I saw it. As a matter of fact one of the least swanky fellows I've met was Fieldmorre—and he wasn't bent on thrusting his title down your throat—at any rate until he'd got enough to buy the usual trimmings. But we're all human, I guess, although an Englishman surely does hate admitting the fact.

The *muezzin* was still wailing the call to prayer, and in the east a faint flush was dawning while I was thinking these things about my white partner. And in a way I loathed myself that I did so, squatting there in the middle of this sacred python outfit, on the brink of being crucified alive. I had liked Fieldmorre heaps; and yet here I was, irritated over what I considered his darned stupidity.

"I say, Tromp," his voice awoke me. "I think there's a snake or something crawling up your robe."

Lord, I went about three feet up in the air; and I saw the glimmer of the darned brute, a small one, as it fell and glided into shadow. Then I laughed, thinking that after all I'd got my weaknesses all right!

"By the way, Tromp," said Fieldmorre when I got comforted again, "I rather think that you're right. This fellow seems always to have got on the weak side of me. If William agrees with us both, you'd better leave it to me to arrange matters with the man, don't you think so?"

"Sure," said I, thinking with a mighty feeling of relief that I did love a man who knew when he was wrong. "You go right ahead and fix him. Listen—what's that?"

A prolonged windy whistle sounded—the wood-buck call.

"That's Billy," said I, and returned it.

Within a few minutes Langster showed up in the rose-pallid light, bearing what looked like a bag of loot. As it happened, he saw Sabah first, still praying his head off, dropped the bag and switched his rifle around. I called out to him that it was all right. He hesitated a moment, and at Fieldmorre's assurance as well, picked up his load and came on.

"What in —— is that —— —— doing alive?" he demanded as he approached the wall, and I couldn't help feeling a glow of satisfaction.

I left it to Fieldmorre to explain. Billy didn't seem pleased, and grumbled—

"Anyway the swine made me upset half the water I had!"

Billy related briefly that the row which I had caused had evidently drawn away the soldiers and that he had walked through into the town as easily, as he put it, as strolling down Fifth Avenue. He had found himself in a quarter of the *millah* ("Salted Quarter" of the Jews). Nobody was about, for Jews were allowed neither to ride nor be out after sunset.

He had broken into a house at random, where he had held up a patriarch and the whole family—had explained as much as he thought fit and demanded food, *et cetera.* Apparently he hadn't needed his rifle.

Although he was somewhat reticent about the affair, we gathered that as he hadn't expected us home till the dawn, expressly stated, he had consented to accept the hospitality of the patriarch and incidentally his pretty daughters. Trust Billy for that!

He had, so he said, spent the whole night in sounding the head of the family. Here, as in all, or nearly all, Mohammedan towns I have ever known or heard of, there were Jews who are always persecuted by the Mohammedans and always have more money than all the others. What they had in the way of goldware was enough to make a pirate swoon, said Billy. However, he had not succeeded as far as he knew in making any practical arrangement for getting away; solely, he insisted, because they were so almighty scared. So Billy.

Anyway we were always good—through Billy apparently—for food and water and also wine of a crude and fierce variety, as he proved. However, on the way back he had found the heroes at their posts and had had to pot the gentleman who opposed his road, the ensuing uproar being the fusillade after him into the sacred wood where, as Sabah had said, none dared to follow.

In the mean time the sun had come and Sabah had finished his devotions, to which Allah I never could determine; but as there are in Islam, as in other religions, sixty-and-seven different sects, I suppose it wasn't of much importance. Having suggested that Fieldmorre explain the position to Billy, I undertook to entertain the king of the bugs, as I irreverently called him.

I WALKED back to meet Sabah as he picked up his prayer carpet, and for our own nefarious purposes said as politely as I knew how:

"See here, Sabah, Lord Fieldmorre and my friend who's just come back want to talk the matter over. If you—um—Watch the sunrise with me, huh?"

Sabah looked at me. He had turned and was facing the east again; the blood glow of the sun was on his face. The eyes and the features which had been like those of an old man were twenty years younger; his flesh seemed firm, and the network of wrinkles was clean wiped out. I remember kind of staring at him and thinking—

"Glory, the poets talk about love; but that's no kind of dope like this!"

He looked at me and quietly sat on the ruined wall; and at the moment Fox, the film man, if he could have seen him, would have given half a million bucks to have him pose as John the Baptist. I'll admit I felt uncomfortable. I'm no diplomat anyway, which fact Billy is too fond of rubbing in to me. Said Sabah—

"You don't—like me, Mr. Tromp."

"I don't, Sabah!" said I, nearly laughing. "But you don't like me, as you were so mighty kind to point out."

"It is impossible!"

"I'm with you," I agreed heartily.

"You do not understand, as it is impossible that the West shall understand the East."

"How about Lord Fieldmorre then?" I queried, wondering what he'd say.

"He comes from the East, for he is of an ancient family, a Celt. But yet he is ruined. For you of the West build your houses on the future, which is sand; and we of the East build on the past, which is rock."

Somehow I reckon my slumbering democratic spirit was riled. I felt kind of mad with all this king and lord stuff.

"Now say, Sabah," said I, "if you want to talk, that's what we'd call sophistry. You seem to think that every guy in the States is some sort of a cross between a dago and a squarehead. Now I'm not given to showing the high spots; but as for family, ——, man! If you must know, my mother was Queen of the Gas-House Gang and my father was the Prince of the Ten Der Loin. His father was the Duke Bronx, who was descended from an illegitimate son of Charlemagne. You've heard of him, haven't you, Sabah?"

"Yes, sir, I have read of him."

"Well, Charlemagne was the direct descendant of Bay Bee Doll, the King of the Ya Hoos. Get that?"

"Yes, sir. And the Ya Hoos?" said Sabah in a distinctly different voice. "Were they of an eastern race?"

"Sure they were," said I solemnly. "The first Aryan race, who, as you must know, came from the Mesopotamian Valley. My great ancestor, Bay Bee Doll, was the king who reigned in the seventeenth century before Christ. Now that's got you beat, hasn't it?"

"I am very glad, sir," responded Sabah gravely, and, turning to a tablet he began wiping away the fungus and creepers.

Presently when Billy and Fieldmorre were through they called to me.

"Say, Phil," said Billy when I had joined them, keeping a weather eye on Sabah, who was still busy with the writing. "Fieldy and I reckon that we'd better try to fix things with Sabah. I suggested putting a gun up against him and making him swear to our terms, but Fieldy reckoned he'd swear his head off to save his hide and go back on us afterward if it suited him."

"That's right," I agreed. "He sure would, the rat!"

"By merely shooting him—as he deserves, I admit—we are just where we were before," butted in Fieldmorre. "My point is that only by appealing to his better side can we hope to get anything from him."

"Better side!" I scoffed. "He don't own any sich animile! But go to it. It's as good as any other scheme."

"Anyway," continued Billy, "if he gets the sultan's job we shan't' run such a risk of being crucified. Are you with us?"

"Sure," said I; "but all the same, keep an eye on him."

"Well, I guess it's that or nothing. Apparently we can stay right here indefinitely, but that won't get us anywhere; or if we do break out—and we can't without the boys—we'd never get through them, the desert and the Tuareg as well."

"That's what I say," assented Billy; "and moreover it's no time to play for anything but getting our bunch free again. If we can do that and raise some guns, I reckon we may yet be able to talk."

Fieldmorre called Sabah and demanded what he intended to do.

"If you gentlemen will stop here until you hear from me for two days," said Sabah, "you will hear surprizing news, for I shall be sultan."

"That's all right," said Billy. "But what about our pals?"

"I will see after them, Mr. Langster."

"And Thorpe?" I queried.

"I will cause many inquiries to be made to see whether he is still alive, sir."

"But how do you propose, Sabah," inquired Fieldmorre, "to become sultan with such extraordinary rapidity; eh?"

"Tomorrow night, my lord, there is a great festival at the temple this man has made, when this Gandhi person will call the sacred serpents from this wood."

"Thank the good Lord!" I interrupted. "Guess I'll have one night of peace!"

"And then," continued Sabah, "I will prove that he is an impostor, a man of shameful birth, and that I am the true king of surprizing power and might."

"How are you going to do that?" I queried, skeptically I suppose.

"That, Mr. Tromp," he retorted with a return of the haughty manner, "can be known only to the initiated of the brethren."

"Go to it!" urged Billy, squashing me with a look. "But where do we come in? We're to stop here while the show's on. Is that the idea?"

It was, according to Sabah.

Fieldmorre again demanded to know how he proposed to protect our men from any atrocities the Gandhi might take it into his head to do. Sabah's replies seemed mighty vague and wabbly. I watched him disappear into the forest with many misgivings. As soon, thought I, as he's got a whack of gilded pomp and power in his nut, he'll go just as crazy as the other guy to prevent news of his darned empire of gold and ivory, men and women, getting through to any of the big land-grabbers; and to do that he'd just have to adopt as murderous a policy as the Gandhi man.

"What gets me," remarked Billy, discussing the situation as we fed on Billy's loot from the Jews, "is how he reckons he's going to turn the sultan trick in five minutes. 'Smatter of fact, I reckon he's as mad as t'other guy. And I surely would love to put him up against that wall over there and let him have what he's asked for. To think of our fellows lying 'way back, and the whole expedition, guns and everything, in the hands of that little Levantine rat, as you call him, just because this other little runt went back on us, makes me hot in the collar."

"Well, Langster," said Fieldmorre coldly, "I've already apologized for my error of judgment in engaging the man, but no one on earth could possibly have foreseen that——"

"Oh, quit it, Fieldy!" retorted Billy. "I've nothing on you. Good Lord, aren't we all in the same boat? Wasn't I as much to blame as you? I'd have bet my shirt that he was straight—until he began the sulky business 'way back. Then I did think it was queer. Let's drop the subject anyway. Here, have some more *Château de Juif*, old dear!"

As a matter of fact we were all pretty well fagged out and by his eyes I reckoned Fieldmorre's busted wound was giving him ——. As before, we divided the day into watches. The other two, covering their faces with their robes, rolled up in the shade, leaving me on deck as I had done the least.

I did some intensive thinking trying out the position from every angle I could imagine, and the more I pondered the less confidence I had in Sabah. I'm always willing to try everything once, but after the first time I never trust a man once he's let me down, on the principle that if he'll do it once he'll surely do it three times if he gets the chance. I had decided before my watch was up that I at any rate would go along to see the show and what they were up to.

As I awoke the first thing I noticed was the pulse of drums and the wail of some reed instruments. I sat up and pulled my *silham* off my face. It was late. The dying sun was blooding the tops of the trees. Billy was still curled up beside me.

I stood up, but I couldn't see Fieldmorre. I called, but there was no response. I awoke Billy. We shouted and hunted around, but Fieldmorre had disappeared. Then, as I was standing on the top of a stele, and Billy was saying that we'd better scout around deeper in the forest, we started as his voice bellowed seemingly close to us:

"Langster! Tromp! I'm——"

The shout ended in a gurgle.

XIX

WE BOTH made a dash in different directions, but discovered no sign of any human being.

"The shout came from here," I insisted as we met again.

"It didn't, you darned idiot," snapped Billy. "It was to my right. Somewhere over there."

We were both convinced that the call had come from contrary points. In the mean time the light was failing rapidly.

"Well, I guess it's no use disputing," said I. "What're we going to do about it? Queer he didn't get a chance to shoot."

"He's been kidnaped," declared Billy. "For if he'd been shot, wounded or killed we should have heard it, and he'd be around somewhere. Anyway that's my hunch. We'll make a thorough search of these ruins. Appears to me as if some one stalked up under cover."

"It's too late," said I as the brief twilight went out. "I've got an idea. If, as you say, he's been kidnaped they can't have got far with him. Let's cast around a bit in a circle."

"What's the good of that? You'll never find his trail if you crossed it in the dark?"

"That's true," I had to admit. "You stop here and I'll make a throw anyway," I added obstinately, although I had no stomach for crawling about in this snake park in the dark.

I went off, carrying my convoy of mosquitoes with me, made my way to the thinning of the timber and by a detour to the left, and came back without finding anything beyond the fact that the cordon of guards was still squatting around us.

To my relief Billy was awaiting me, but without news. Crouching beside our bit of ruined wall, we settled down for the night, sometimes discussing in a whisper Fieldmorre's fate, but mostly watching and listening intently in opposite directions. Somewhere about midnight Billy suddenly fired and leaped over the wall, shouting—

"Keep me covered!"

Wondering what he had seen, I did so, and heard him breaking about in the bushes. Presently he returned, swearing.

"Must have missed him," he told me, "for I sure saw the white robes of a man beyond that tree there."

Throughout the remainder of the night, except for the hum of mosquitoes and the distant drums, there was no disturbance. Dawn came at last, and while waiting for the sun we hastily ate and drank. Then we made for the spot where Billy had sworn he had seen some one. He was right, for a trail of broken branches and trampled grass was plain. Not ten yards along Billy gave a whoop.

"Got him! Look, there's his blood!"

"Or is it Fieldmorre's?" I queried.

The trail led directly into the dense thicket which we had taken for dense jungle when cursorily passing it before. Thirty yards within, we came upon another ruined wall and found ourselves in what had evidently been the courtyard of a great temple abandoned for long, as was evidenced by the presence of great trees and dense vegetation. Here we came upon a spot soaked with blood, eloquently proving that the man had been badly wounded and had been compelled to rest awhile.

Deeper in, following the blood spoor, we came upon another kind of portico of serpentine columns in a better state of preservation than the first we had found. Within this was the body of the temple, with fairly high ruins of the walls. The roof, if ever there had been one, had long since gone, but there were abundant signs that human beings used the place.

And on the far side, amid a small forest of young trees, rose a tall, round shaft jutting up from two great black stones, evidently used as a kind of altar, sprawling upon which was the form of a man dressed in peculiar-color robes such as we had never seen before, and a green turban.

"Must be a priest," commented Billy after examining the corpse, which had been shot through the lungs. "That would account for his daring to enter the sacred grove. I guess he or his fellows must have kidnaped Fieldy. There must be a way out—through the back probably. Come on."

But before going, I gave a glance at the shaft, which was polished and covered with what Sabah had declared were Aramaic characters relating the history of the Queen of Sheba; and from the general form of the monument and drawings upon part of the walls I saw that the python was symbol of the primitive nature worship. Also I remarked that before the black stones where lay the dead man the ground was cleared and beaten flat by many feet, suggesting that there was perhaps an inner cult which still used the old temple in preference to the one erected by the Gandhi.

As Billy had guessed, from a corner of the ruined temple a distinct trail led through some creepers, evidently purposely left to mask the path, to a hole in the wall. After scouting cautiously beyond, we went through and found ourselves in dense jungle on quite a well-beaten path.

"Say, Billy," said I, "they must have carried off Fieldmorre along this path. I guess we'd better go along and investigate."

"That's right," he agreed; "and what's more, I'm for taking a chance. See if we can get into the town and to my Jews. Maybe I can persuade 'em to fix us up with some disguise."

"I'm with you. Tonight the show, according to Sabah, and I am determined to see that out anyway. But, Billy, Jew clothes won't be any good. They sure won't let Jews into their movie palace."

" 'Course not, but they can get other gear. Send out the girl to buy it. The only point is, how're we going to get through the guards? The timber runs pretty close up to the old wall of the *millah.* It's partly ruined, and I found an easy gap to scramble through. Anyway we'll see. Come along."

On the edge of the dense jungle we could see through the light timber a group of three guards squatting in the shade of an angle of a buttress of the wall. The next group was out of sight as far as we could see after a bit of scouting.

"There's only one way," said I. "That, I reckon, is to stalk near enough for a sure shot. You take one and I another and both the third as he tries to bolt, which he surely will."

By careful crawling we drew to the edge of the light timber. Beyond there was no cover at all, and some sixty or seventy yards of soggy ground between us and the guard, who appeared, we could now see, to be playing some kind of game.

"You take the fellow in the far corner," whispered Billy. "If that other guy would kindly move his head about four inches I might get 'em both."

Even as he spoke, the man, in leaning forward to play, unwittingly complied. Billy fired a fraction of a second before I did. My man crumpled into the corner where he was sitting. Looking, I saw that both Billy's men had leaped to their feet. One swung round and pitched on to his face; but the other, apparently mad with fright, charged straight toward us. Billy dropped him half-way.

"Now run like the ——," he called, "before they get after us."

Billy had in fact mighty nigh got two in one shot, for as we passed, I saw the man who'd started charging us had a gash right across his eyes, which had surely blinded him instantly. As we gained the broken gap a little to the left we heard shouts and saw some other guards running round the wood. Whether they had seen us or not we couldn't judge.

As I dropped after Billy into the dirty

street of the quarter, a young Jew and a donkey turned the corner. Billy brought his rifle up. The man squawked and fled, leaving his laden donkey. We stopped a moment to put on our slippers, for no one but a slave or a Jew would walk barefoot in a town.

"Now we get into a bazaar street," said Billy. "One thing, they'll think we're Arabs and won't scarce dare look at us. My old pal lives down a side lane beyond here."

THE market street was crowded with men and women, the men all wearing black *soutanes* and embroidered yellow slippers, and the women red ones, as here in their own quarters they were allowed to do so.

The tiny shops, about three feet from the ground beneath the ragged and broken mats stretched overhead as an awning from house to house, were still crowded with the morning marketers. Except for cringing out of our way as we swaggered slowly along—for speed on foot would have been suspicious—scarcely a man looked at us. Without incident we arrived before the usual iron-studded gates of a Moorish house but painted Jewish style a bright blue.

Holding our guns beneath our robes in order not to scare the inmates, Billy thumped on the door, and to the negro slave who appeared, demanded in a grumbling, guttural Arabic to see the master. We were shown into the usual guest-room, not forgetting to leave our slippers on the threshold, and presently there appeared an old fellow who, in his black *soutane* and venerable beard, looked as if he had stepped out of that picture of Elijah feeding the ravens.

In Arabic he politely welcomed us to his house and all that was his, in the customary manner; but it didn't take half an eye to see that he was mighty scared, for he well knew that did the Arabs learn that he had sheltered us they would make it a good excuse to sack his home, at the very least.

Yet in spite of that he did not forget his courtesy, and while talking oriental commonplaces caused his daughters to wait on us with wine and sweetmeats on golden plates—young girls with blue-black hair and what I thought big pop eyes. However, Billy seemed to get along with them fine, and evidently they were unanimous in their opinion of him.

Later when Billy explained exactly what we needed I think the old boy was tickled to death that the demand was so light. Anyway he sent a slave out in an almighty hurry to buy *jelabah* of camel hair, a grayish color with bits of colored ribbon scattered about it, and dirty *rozzah*, such as is affected by the country and desert tribes.

We hadn't any means of paying for them, but to offer would not have been etiquette, and I, who had never had much to do with the Jewish element, made a ghastly error by calling down the blessings of Allah upon his venerable head. However, he didn't take it amiss—being accustomed, I guess, to more serious insults than that—and made haste to offer us food.

But he was obviously yearning for our departure; yet he was quite a sport, was old Ibrahim ibn Yusuf, and never by the flicker of an eye did he show how mad he was. He left us alone for an hour after the meal to rest and then came to bid us farewell. Billy didn't see any more of the girls or he might have been tempted to linger. So about eight-thirty A.M. with our rifles slung under our armpits beneath the voluminous *jelabah* we went out into the glare again.

Of course neither Billy nor I knew the road nor, except vaguely, the direction of the palace. We sauntered along in that general direction until we came to the walls of the *millah*, and by following them came to the gate and so into the main city. Wandering through an arch, we found ourselves in the courtyard of a mosque.

In the center, as usual, was the pool for making the ablutions. Now as I hadn't had a bath or even a wash for so long that I couldn't remember the last time, so to speak, that cool water had some attraction. Of course I, during those awful years, had learned every action of the ceremonial ritual; but the trouble was that I didn't know whether Billy did; and as there were two men busy we mighty betray ourselves if Billy unwittingly made a blunder. I asked him in a low voice in Arabic if he knew and he assented; so, strolling up, we doffed our slippers and began.

One of the two men was a hawk-nosed son of a gun who looked like one of our Tuareg friends. As I was at work, longing to strip and get right in, I noticed that he was staring hard. I glanced at Billy, scared that he was making a mess of things; but I couldn't discover anything noticeably wrong except that his rifle was sticking out beneath his robes, as I suppose mine was, about half a foot. But that wasn't anything abnormal.

Then I noticed that the fellow was staring at me, and particularly at my hands. Then I understood. I had forgotten to slip off a ring. Now to orthodox Mohammedans gold ornaments are forbidden, though that didn't worry these people any; but my ring was obviously of European make.

I whispered to Billy to quit right then. We slowly slipped on our shoes and began to walk off. I saw the fellow out of my eye mumbling away to himself. Then he started to follow. Evidently the fact that we hadn't entered the mosque to pray after ablutions was another suspicious point.

I took a hurried glance around and spotted another gate leading out into what looked like a quiet lane. As we made for it I whispered to Billy to get his rifle loose.

At that moment another man came walking across the courtyard, making for the fountain. Swiftly calculating that he wouldn't be in the line of vision by the time our man reached the arch, I whispered again to Billy.

"Pretend to part under the arch. Wait round the corner and I'll slug him as he comes through. If I miss, you must get him. If he starts something, we're lost."

According, in the arch we faced about and made a pretense of saying good-by, Arab fashion, and then stopped dead on either side of the wall. Fortunately the lane was empty. A minute later came the shuffling of our inquisitive friend. Then I got him.

He went down without any fuss; and after pulling his unconscious body out of sight in order not to disturb the faithful on their way to prayer, we turned to beat it up the lane as fast as we could. But bearing down upon us was a man who must have seen the whole thing.

We both pulled up and began to walk sedately but with our rifles out. As the fellow came on I saw that he had a red beard, and something about him seemed familiar. When he came abreast, but on the other side of the lane, and the sun was straight in our eyes, I nearly let out a yell. However, although he looked us straight in the eyes he didn't seem to know us or to have witnessed what he must have seen. I hesitated. Yet I was dead sure of that puggy nose. Said Billy—

"Wasn't that Vèron?"

We both turned and stared after him. I daren't call out in case it might not be. The fellow kept steadily on.

"Mighty queer," commented Billy. "I could have sworn it was Vèron, and yet—And anyway he must have seen——"

"Me too," said I. "Let's go after and see. Here, I'll tackle him."

But as I started after him three men came in sight. We slowed up and walked sedately along until they were past, but by that time the man whom we suspected had passed into a main street. We followed on doggedly, not daring to hurry after him; and he, we noticed, seemed to have put on the pace a bit.

The street got more and more crowded as we came into a market square beginning to fill with country people and camels, mules and donkeys, and we had some difficulty in keeping the tag on our man. Several times we lost him, only to find him by the glint of that red beard.

Once we nearly got into trouble with a beggar who was holding up people for alms; under the guise of being crazy, and therefore holy; and we unfortunately hadn't any *fluss*—the base Moroccan copper or the cowrie shells, the local change—upon us. However, Billy, with presence of mind, misquoted a *sura* of the Koran, which impressed him enough to give us a chance to slip by and let him focus his attention on the next victim.

After that we had to take a chance and hurry to overtake our man, who had again disappeared. This time we couldn't locate him for some time until we made a sudden turn, when we found ourselves in a large square before what was evidently the palace of the Gandhi, beneath the great arch of which I caught the gleam of his red beard as he stood talking to one of the guards. This time the sun was not in my eyes, but directly upon him, and as he spoke a gesture he made with one hand convinced me.

"By ——, it *is* Vèron!" I exclaimed to Billy, recklessly in English.

But at that moment Red-Beard turned and walked into the palace.

XX

"NOW that's darned funny," said Billy in a low tone as, the middle of the square being empty, we turned off. "How did that son-of-a-gun get loose?"

"Same as us, I guess," I retorted. "He can talk like a native, and he passed as one for years."

"But what's he up to anyway? I mean in there?"

"Search me," said I. "How should I know? But he must have recognized us. Why did he refuse to speak?"

"The point is, where are the others? You never know. He may be working to get 'em loose, too. He may not have known us in this Berber get-up. He may——"

"*Skut!*" (Shut up) I whispered as a party of Arabs came toward us, and added in Arabic, "let us go to the crowd yonder."

We strolled slowly over and into a market being held on the far side of the square. As we wandered silently through the crowd we saw several negroes standing upon blocks evidently slaves for sale.

As I ran my eyes along them I jerked Billy's sleeve to come away, for I had recognized two of our personal servants standing chained and looking very miserable. But I feared that should they see us they might give away our identity by some appeal for help.

Farther along was another crowd. We approached it cautiously, attracted by some one volubly holding forth like a soapbox politician. As we came nearer I pricked up my ears at the repeated mention of "Infidel" and "doctor." We lingered on the outskirts and listened.

The man was Doc Seeger's boy. We pushed and elbowed our way closer; and then I got a shock, for, squatting on the ground, was the doc himself. I nudged Billy, thinking—

"Darnation, the whole gang seems to have broken loose; but we—well, we were loose, too, in a way, but we have lost Fieldmorre."

Billy had seen, and we edged still closer until we were in the second rank of the crowd. The doc's boy was holding forth about the generosity of the Sultan Gandhi, who had taken under his protection the infidel doctor, who had, according to the law, been pardoned for his ignorance, as he had consented to become a Mohammedan—

Under all this bunk—which I guessed right away meant that the Gandhi was going to try to kid the doctor into being his own medical advisor, instead of trusting to mixtures of medieval surgery and magic—the doc, whose knowledge of Arabic was of the slightest, sat grinning amiably without a notion of what was being said.

Unable to speak, Billy and I concentrated our gaze on him, trying to catch his eye, but it was some time before he would cease smirking in every direction except ours. At last he did, and I saw the idiot start in surprize. But a finger on my lips kept him quiet until he had time to think things out.

Almost imperceptibly I gestured to get away somehow, and he got it. He seemed pretty free, for immediately he rose, and in broken Arabic told his man he wanted to go home.

The boy, being fond of his own voice and the attention his charge was exciting, continued yapping for a while; but when the doc grew insistent, obeyed, clearing a way, with many insulting jests at the unconscious "convert," through the crowd. We followed, of course, and also the usual crowd.

He made for a small gate in the palace wall not far away, giving us a look as he went in. We dawdled about, but to our disgust so did several of the overcurious, just the same way as our own folk will stare till their eyeballs ache at the house where the latest murder has been committed.

As we waited, suddenly the drums and wailing pipes broke out quite near us.

"We'd better get a taxi," whispered Billy, "or we won't get a seat."

About twenty minutes later I saw that the small wicket window in the gate was opened slightly. Evidently the doc was peeking out to see if we were there and the road was clear. At last, although there were still half a dozen idiots loafing about, I whispered to Billy—

"Let's lounge against the door as if we were born tired, and maybe if the doc's there he'll let us slip in."

By degrees we edged over and squatted down on the threshold. Presently we heard the breathing of some one on the other side and the creak of the window door, and the doc's voice said:

"Oh, my ——, is that really you chaps?"

"Sure," I replied. "Can't you let us in?"

We heard a bolt creak and he whispered—

"Quick!"

We rose and slipped inside. We were in a garden thickly screened with trees and shrubs.

"By ——, I am glad to see you!" exclaimed Doc Seeger, and he looked it. "But, ssh! Don't talk too loud. Come here; I daren't take you in the house."

He led the way into the shrubbery, and we crouched under a bush.

"Where's that enterprising nigger of yours?" demanded Billy.

"I don't quite trust him," said the doc. "But he loves the needle, so I gave him a shot of morphia to keep him quiet."

"But," said I, "where are the others? Hardwicke and the men? Have you seen Vèron?"

"Haven't seen Vèron nor Hardwicke, but I was kept with the other fellows until we arrived here. Then they brought me to the sultan. Seems rather a decent sort. He assured me that you fellows were all right and that if I'd treat him he'd make us all rich. He's suffering from scorbutic troubles. Gave me this house here and my own boy, but he's got too darned cheeky.

"But, man, the country's lousy with gold! Where have you got your place?"

"Our what?" queried Billy.

"Your house. He told me that you were his guests and that he had put you up in another wing of the palace."

"Didn't you think it kind of queer," said I, "that you were never allowed to see us?"

"Yes, I did, but he spun a long yarn about trouble with his fanatical people and said that for a week it was better to keep us apart. But where's Lord Fieldmorre?"

We told him briefly what had happened. He whistled softly.

"My ——, if I'd known that, I'd have given him a shot that would have kept him quiet, the swine!"

"That wouldn't have been any darn good," retorted Billy, "for there's another crazy guy," and he told him about Sabah.

"Well, I'm ——!" exploded Seeger. "I shouldn't have suspected him. Thought he was absolutely devoted to Lord Fieldmorre. Everybody seems going off their heads. But what about Vèron?"

We related the little we knew about him, and he couldn't throw any light on the problem. He didn't even know where the other men were located, for he had been led to the Gandhi at night and had straightway been taken to his new quarters in the palace.

"I thought the whole thing ruddy funny," he remarked. "But he seemed a decent sort and I thought the best thing I could do was to submit and see what was going to happen."

"Sure," I assented. "Wouldn't have got you anywhere if you had kicked. Anyway he wouldn't have crucified you—at least not until he caught another white doctor. Got any guns?"

"Yes," said he. "That's funny, too. They took away all the other fellows' arms but let me keep my Mauser pistol. In fact, I felt rather rotten because they made a fuss of me all along the road—as a doctor, you know."

"Sure," said Billy; "that was that swine Sabah's doing. There's a big show tonight," he continued, and told the doc our suspicions. "And, see here, guess you'd better get that gun and come along with us unless you'd rather stop here. You're free to do as you like, doc, for the expedition's busted all right."

"Of course I'll come along with you, you chaps—unless you think I'd do better by sticking a needle into that Levantine rat."

"Too late," said Billy. "But, look here, Seeger, we want you to understand that you've got a chance to save yourself. Ours is pretty rocky as far as we can see. But we feel it's up to us to try to help Fieldmorre and the boys from a filthy death, although the chances are that we all go under together. That's about all there is to it.

"What Vèron's up to I can't get. Of course he may be working or trying to work with us once he gets in touch. He may be in touch with the boys and maybe he ain't. Anyway that's about all there is to it. Isn't that right, Phil?"

"Sure," said I.

"Good ——!" exclaimed the doc. "There isn't any question. You fellows don't think a white man's going to sit here and see you chaps hacked to pieces without inquiring why? I'll get my pistol now. And— But what exactly is the plan?"

I described for his benefit the snake outfit and the pleasant things the Gandhi had promised to do with us, which evidently he had every intention of carrying out.

"There is a faint chance," I added, "that Sabah may somehow pry this other guy out of the sultan job and do something for us; but personally I reckon I wouldn't waste a dime on the betting. We aim to get in with the bunch and find out whether they really are set on carrying out the crucifying stunt. If that's so, all we can do is to save them from torture by shooting them ourselves and then—good night, nursie! Get me?"

Doc Seeger gazed at me searchingly.

"You really think it's as bad as that, Tromp?"

"Sure I do! I know 'em. Don't forget that!"

"That's true."

He rose.

"All right," he added. "I won't be a sec."

"Say," said Billy, "if you can, you'd best get another robe from some one. Like ours if you can."

"All right; I'll borrow my boy's. He'll sleep peacefully for an hour or more. I say, d'you want anything to eat before we start?"

But neither Billy nor I felt any need. Within a few minutes he returned in the rough *jelab* of his servant. I looked him over. Fortunately, Seeger was dark and his beard was fairly long and ragged—in fact he would pass muster better than Billy or I, although fair Berbers were common enough, to which fact we owed the safety of our disguise.

"Anyway pull your hood well over your face," was all I could suggest to shadow the unusual blueness of his eyes.

AT THE garden gate we took the precaution to peek through the latchet window, but most of the loafers had gone. Across the square were many people streaming in one direction.

"Early doors, two bits," commented Billy flippantly as we went through.

Cautioning the doc to keep his mouth shut in any circumstances, we followed on and joined the throng on foot, composed of the usual Mandingo population, mixed negro-Berber with a sprinkling of lower-class women muffled to the eyes in the *haik* or blanket.

We had again slung our guns under our armpits and beneath the *jelabah*, envying the portability of the doc's Mauser and wooden stock-case. In the general hum of conversation about I caught a few words from a group of higher-class Berbers who were gravely discussing some prophecy made by an *imam* in a certain mosque frequented by the sect of the Druse, to the effect that there would appear at this sacred festival the reincarnation of Darazi the prophet—evidently, I reckoned, some of Sabah's propaganda.

Other words picked up here and there regarding "infidels" and the "lords of the forest" gave me an inkling that the Gandhi intended to carry out the fiendish atrocities he had promised, apparently upon the boys whom he still had in captivity.

I've faced the final proposition several times before, but just the same a fellow doesn't get used to it—at least I don't. I've got lots of red blood and can see ahead lots of fun in life. I was fond of Billy and other people I had known and knew and hoped to meet again. But those words meant, if they meant anything, that the end wasn't very far off; for, as we had agreed, there was only one thing to do and only one way out.

I swore under my breath in good American at the luck of it, the treachery of Sabah and the bobbing-up, of all people in the world, of this little Levantine whose face I'd smacked for woman-beating. Yet there was a faint chance that Sabah might redeem himself, which Billy seemed to think possible, but I didn't.

A crook may play straight with his kind, but a traitor never will; at any rate not a fanatical Islamite against Christians. However, I'd got a nearly full bandoleer and a gun, which was considerably better than to be strung up like a chicken to have my neck wrung.

While I was indulging in these cheerful ideas Billy tugged at my sleeve, motioning me to slow down. I followed his glance ahead, and after a bit spotted on the right five of our late Hausa soldiers. If they recognized us the row would start right there, and that was the last thing we wanted.

I pulled my hood farther over my face, and we dropped back into the crowd, edging toward the other side. While I was calculating the chances of the others being about or near us in the arena Billy got the right idea.

Nudging me, he unrolled the first band of his *rozzah* and wrapped it across his face mask fashion, leaving only the eyes exposed. That we should do so meant little in this country. A Tuareg would always wear his veil, which was really used to keep out the desert sand, even in a town; and anyway bandits and other gentry who don't wish to be recognized adopt the same method without raising comment on a fête day.

Scarcely had we done so than right under my nose appeared the very Hausa who had knocked me out from behind when I was foolishly staring at the giant monitor. I sure did long to reach out and get a grip of that man, but it couldn't be done.

The drums were still going. Presently we swung with the crowd to the right. At the bottom of the great square were two big, arched gates evidently leading into the temple, which was, I knew, attached to the palace. Outside the crowd surged and swayed and chattered just like a bunch waiting to get into Madison Square Garden. It was too risky to talk, in case some one spotted our accent, but to keep up appearances I fumbled beneath my *jelab* as if I were telling my beads and mumbled incessantly—

"Allah-lah, lah-Allah!"

Billy, tumbling to the idea, followed suit, so no doubt as extra holy guys we attracted little attention.

We drifted with the tide to the northern gate. Fortunately, in the east they're not great on tickets, particularly for a sacred stunt such as this was, so that except for the guards lounging about the gate of the entrance there was no one to challenge us. As we approached, the crowd of course became denser and denser until we were packed as tight as sardines in a can and, whew! How they stank!

At length, without mishap, we got through the zigzag gate and into the temple, which of course I had seen before with the Gandhi. All the steps running up to the buildings walling in three sides were white with humanity, and the roofs were packed with women looking with dark faces sticking out of their *haiks* like penguins on an iceberg. Driven in the rush, as we entered we found ourselves to the left. Thinking of possible eventualities, I risked something by whispering into Billy's ear in Arabic—

"Up against the wall!"

By furious elbow and shoulder work, and guttural grunts by way of retaliatory oaths, we gained at last not the wall, but pretty near and beneath the arched portico.

The swimming-pool was empty, and the waters of the lake, ending in the sacred grove where we had hidden, glittered in the brilliant sun. The ivory-and-gold throne of the Gandhi, directly beneath us and about fifty yards' rifle-shot away, was empty, and about it was a large space.

Behind this kind of stage was another dais filled with men in white robes and green turbans. The drums and wailing of the pipes came from somewhere hidden behind.

Evidently we had just got in in time, for above the hum of general talk came outcries as the guards were closing out the rest. The stream of people ceased, and the rhythm of the drums suddenly increased and stopped abruptly.

An *iman* standing by a large gate in the palace building side began to cry out in the wailing voice of the Muezzin, and the crowd became silent. The door opened, and the Gandhi appeared—in white from head to foot, as I had seen him, with the great emerald glittering on his turban. About him was a bunch of some two dozen of the gorgeously dressed nobles.

As he walked in silence to the throne all bent low their heads, and we had to follow suit. When he was seated the noble fellows squatted down between him and the priests.

There was silence for a few moments, and I wondered what was going to happen. Then I spotted a commotion in the same door from which the Gandhi had emerged, and amid a rushing sound of approval and satisfaction there appeared a party of eunuchs carrying, bound to a cross, the naked form of Fieldmorre. I recognized him instantly by the blob of the bleeding wound on his thigh.

"My ——!" I exclaimed, half-starting to my feet.

"Shut up, you fool!" whispered Billy, grabbing my wrist. "Wait!"

Fortunately our neighbors were too absorbed in this pleasant spectacle to notice my diversion.

After Fieldmorre were borne Pexton, Hibbert and O'Donnell; and the four were staked in ready-made holes on the edge of the water.

XXI

I SET my teeth and remained quiet, working my rifle loose as I watched. From the distance I couldn't see for sure whether they were in pain or not, but none gave a cry or even cursed. A guttural oath of satisfaction that "the lords of the forest" would be well entertained by so goodly a number of infidels nigh broke my resolve to keep my tongue still. And from all sides came guttural murmurs of approval, faintly echoed in the lighter tones and squeals from the women on the roofs.

Then suddenly there rose the thin wail of the Gandhi reed pipe. Against the white of his robes I could see the black head of the cobra appear, glide from the throat-slit of the *silham* and coil around and up until as before the snake's head was swaying above the emerald on the turban. At that everybody became silent, only the tight breathing registering the excitement of nervous expectancy.

A guttural grunt near me brought my eyes out to the lake and I nudged Billy's arm. On the glittering surface of the sunlit water appeared a ripple and two moving specks, leaving in their wakes molten silver streaks. A quivering "u-h-h!" ran through the crowd, and every man craned forward, staring fixedly at the advancing serpents. Other dots of silver wreaths appeared behind.

The wailing pipe continued rising and falling in that creepy way it had. In the water of the tank, the pythons glinted in the sun. The leader seemed to hurl or shoot itself beyond the stone lip on to the earth; but the second reared, and, failing to get a grip with its flexible ribs, slid back into the water and disappeared. Another glided over seemingly without effort.

One after another they came, obeying the strange call, passing close beneath the crosses bearing the victims, until there were some thirteen or fourteen serpents arranged around the white-shrouded figure on the gold-and-ivory throne, their chromatic bodies swaying to the crying of the pipe, the hideous cobra on the head of Gandhi seeming to beat time like some ghastly conductor.

What was going to happen next I did not know, since the Gandhi had merely given me a kind of exhibition show, I guessed, by way of something for me to think about. I could see Pexton and O'Donnell twisting their heads sidewise to peer down in an effort to see what was going on beneath them. Fieldmorre either was unconscious of them or resigned, but I could see the strain of his shoulder muscles as he tried to take the weight off his wounded leg.

Then just as I was wondering how long this performance was going on and what was to happen, I started as I heard from a little to the right among a group of robed figures the preliminary squeak of another pipe. As the thin wail trickled out hundreds of heads turned in that direction, and I sighed with a feeling of relief, thinking that this was Sabah starting in to redeem his promise.

At first I couldn't make out what he was after. The sound rose in volume, and in some way I couldn't define the rhythm or tune was slightly different from that of the Gandhi, who had flashed an angry glance in the direction of the interloper, but was still playing. Then, accompanied by a half-supressed "uh" of astonishment from the crowd, I saw two pythons sway away from the charmer on the throne and begin to glide toward the rival.

One after another the others followed the lead. The Gandhi's pipe rose in volume and speed; but even the black cobra coiled down his shoulders and across the floor to the new music, which seemed irresistible, and climbed up on Sabah's head.

As the first two serpents approached Sabah those about him scattered in violent haste until there was a space as big as that around the throne about him. Within ten minutes every serpent had deserted the Gandhi and was swaying ecstatically around the squatted form of Sabah!

Suddenly the Gandhi ceased playing, and, leaping to his feet, shouted angrily to his gorgeous body-guard to seize the sacrilegious stranger. Some of them started forward, some raised their guns, but more hung back.

I saw Sabah's clever move. None of them dared attack while the holy snakes were about him. The Gandhi lost his cold dignity and shouted and cursed futilely, recalling the time I had stopped him beating up the woman slave.

Among the green-turbaned priests at the back an excited discussion was going on, but the great audience seemed too astonished or awed to do much beyond stare and gasp oaths upon Allah to the accompaniemnt of subdued squeaks and cries from the roofs.

The Gandhi, shrieking with rage, turned upon his nobles, who, clustering around him, fell to shouting and protesting; and above the din the wail of Sabah's pipe played on and on, and the pythons swayed their chromatic bodies as if they were being driven crazy with excitement by the cobra conductor on Sabah's head.

Evidently, thought I, there was no precedent for such a happening, so that none of them knew what ought to be done. As I was wondering whether Sabah intended to try to wear out the dancing snakes until they were harmless from fatigue or whether he was waiting for some expected reenforcements to arrive, there came a gasp from the crowd, bringing my eyes back in time to see him take the pipe from his mouth and stick it within his *jelab*, where, with his fingers still operating the holes, it continued to play as loudly as ever.

He had me puzzled, and for a moment I almost thought—noticing a gentle undulation going on beneath his robe—what the natives had evidently thought; that a snake was actually blowing into the instrument. Then of course I tumbled. He'd got a bagpipe arrangement concealed beneath his *jelab*.

Then in a high, piercing voice that was audible all over the place he began to talk, a long-winded affair, claiming that he was a kind of messiah and the next incarnation of the Druse prophet, Darazi, mixed up with a lot of muddled Mohammedan law, and the crazy yarn of his descent from Abgar Ukkama and all the rest of it.

No sooner had he paused for a moment than a band near to him, who were evidently his pals, began to shriek—

"Messiah!"

With the pipe still wailing, but more softly, and the pythons working like a Broadway ballet, he began again making some sort of challenge to the group of holy men, or *ullema* as he called them, in the green turbans, finishing up with a regular Tammany attack upon the Gandhi, calling him names that an Egyptian donkey boy would surely admire.

He had some powers of oratory, had Sabah, when he fairly got going; for he held that bunch against what the Gandhi and what was left of his partisans could do to drown him, and finished by having the whole crowd on its feet yelling for the Gandhi's gore. Then, evidently reckoning that he was safe from the mob, he ceased playing. As soon as the pythons began to glide back to the water the row subsided a bit, and all eyes watched them as if expecting them to make some signal or to read the supposed meaning of their movements.

Even the cobra snuggled into his clothes, as much at home as with its late master. Anyway it seemed all right for him, for he rose and walked sedately in their wake. The Gandhi, who appeared to have lost his head entirely or had realized that the game was up, stood silent with one hand on the throne.

Then, halting abruptly, Sabah raised one hand up, called out some phrase in a chanting voice which I didn't catch, probably in Aramaic, which seemed to be his trump card, for instantly came a roar of assent. Then, pointing to the Gandhi, he commanded the gang of nobles, who were standing in a bunch like a flock of scared sheep, to throw their sultan to the lords of the forest.

Immediately three of them walked out gravely and took hold of the Gandhi, who, to my astonishment, didn't appear to attempt to struggle, nor did he cry out as, picking him up, they walked deliberately to the water edge and threw him in.

The splash sounded in dead silence. He disappeared, came up, and began to swim. Then suddenly a hand shot up, and his screech echoed against the palace walls. There was a glint of colors amid the swash of a chromatic body in a swirl, and he had disappeared. For all that his fate was our salvation, I couldn't help but shudder.

AS SOON as the ripples had subsided Sabah turned, walking very slowly, watched by all, and took his seat on the empty throne.

"By ——, he's got away with it," I muttered to Billy; fortunately I wasn't remarked by my absorbed neighbors.

"Now," thought I with a mighty feeling of relief, "I guess he'll get busy and cut down Fieldmorre and the rest."

As soon as he was seated he drew out the pipe again and began to play as before. Out came the cobra and climbed around his head, and from the water returned the pythons.

"What the ——," I muttered angrily to myself, "is he after now?"

And I tried to comfort my anxiety with the thought that he was playing safe to fool the crowd and get 'em tame or something.

When the brutes were about him in full blast of their hideous dance he again switched on the bagpipe gear and began to chant something—in Aramiac, I suppose—which I didn't understand.

My toes were twitching in nervous impatience when a movement to one side caught my attention. From behind the group of nobles and priests at the back of the throne came running some men got up in the same colored robes as the man Billy had shot in the night whom we'd found dead in the old temple. They came down at a trot to the four crosses, and as the thought was half-way into my mind that they were going to release our pals the foremost lifted a kind of staff and smashed O'Donnell across the shins, breaking his leg.

The word "Ahab" flashed into my mind, and I yelled to Billy and the doc:

"It's all up! Get those swine first!"

I dragged out my rifle and fired at Sabah. As Billy's rifle and the doc's Mauser spoke Sabah slumped across the throne, and two of the executioners dropped in their tracks.

XXII

AS I jerked another cartridge into place, hoping that we should have time to rescue the four from Ahab's death by torture, there broke out a sudden familiar rattle followed by shrieks. In a glance I saw that it came from the roof over the sultan's palace.

Against a background of flying women I got a glimpse of a red beard.

"Vèron!" I yelled. "Fight our way down and make for the palace!"

But Billy and the doc had caught on as quickly as I. Fortunately our neighbors were either unarmed or too dumfounded to attack. Swinging our guns right and left, we had comparatively little trouble in smashing a path through the shouting, swearing crowd.

But in the open space was a sight which made me, even in that moment, draw back; for Vèron had turned his first volley right upon the mass of dancing snakes, and now they were fleeing for the water, those that were left, while the others squirmed and writhed in chromatic knots.

Billy, who had no childish fears, dashed among them toward the four crucified. I followed, observing that the machine gun was deliberately playing over our heads, spraying in a deadly half-circle to keep them off us, taking no notice whatever of the frantic crowd tramping each other to get through the gates.

In a nightmare of writhing pythons about us I made for Fieldmorre, and, not stopping to try to cut or untie his bonds, picked him and the cross up bodily. As I did so I caught a signal from Vèron on the roof to make for the palace. Whether it was the doc or Billy who cut the other three loose or not I never knew; but as I staggered with my burden I was conscious of Billy, bearing O'Donnell with the smashed shin, and the other two passing me.

We reached the gates and some one slammed it behind us. Then the Maxim stopped.

My first action naturally was to see to my rescue, Fieldmorre, who, as the doc hacked at his bonds, smiled grimly and whispered—

"Thanks awfully, Tromp."

He was in a pretty bad mess, but insisted upon borrowing a robe to cover himself. As the doc got busy making temporary splints for O'Donnell the red beard of Vèron appeared in the large room, shouting excitedly in French.

"Come on, you fellows!" exclaimed Fieldmorre, limping toward the stairway. "Vèron says we'll have to stand off an attack."

Grabbing my gun, which somehow I'd had the sense not to let go of, I followed him to the roof together with Billy, Hibbert and Pexton. All the women had naturally quit *pronto*. While Vèron jabbered rapidly to Fieldmorre, I took a look around.

In the temple of snakes there was nobody left at all except the scattered corpses of those shot. To my surprize the open market square was empty too, but from the row going on just around the corner I guessed that they were pulling themselves together for the final rush.

In that pause it suddenly occurred to me that although Vèron had rescued us it wouldn't help any after all, except that we would be able to make 'em pay the more dearly.

As far as I knew we had neither food nor water; and even if we could manage to grab water from the pool beneath and find food somewhere, sooner or later they'd get us through sheer weight of numbers as they had Gordon in Khartum. I had just fired at the hint of a turban peeking around a corner of the street and was trying to figure out how long they'd take to reorganize enough to rush, when Billy and Pexton joined me.

"Say, Phil," Billy remarked, "don't you think it's darned queer they don't make a rush to finish us? What's to stop 'em anyway?"

"Indeed that's what I was saying," added Pexton.

Just then we all three started at the unmistakable angry rattle of *mitrailleuses*. The sounds came from several directions at once and were accompanied by erratic volleys from rifles. As we stared wonderingly we noticed a parcel of natives dash excitedly across the deserted square as if they had forgotten we were on the roof.

"Good ——!" exclaimed Billy. "Sounds like a relief column! But that's impossible!"

"Perhaps," suggested Pexton, "they've started scrapping among themselves—Sabah's part, I mean, against the others."

"Glory," I was beginning, "if that's so, maybe we'll have a chance. Let's get——"

But at that moment Fieldmorre hailed us from where he was seated on the coping of the roof talking to Vèron. He said quietly as if apologizing formally for bumping against a fellow coming out of a show:

"William, and you, Tromp, I'm afraid that I owe you an apology all round." I stared dumbly, thinking maybe he was a bit delirious. There was a queer, tight look about his mouth which wasn't on account of pain or exhaustion; something seemed to have angered him into almost forgetting his suffering.

"It seems that we've been betrayed all along. D'you hear those guns there? That's a French column."

"French column!" I echoed stupidly.

"What—Vèron—" began Billy, seizing upon the truth more quickly than I.

"Yes; you're right, William. As a matter of fact I suppose it doesn't much matter, for if it hadn't been for his—er—patriotism, if you like, we should have been most certainly wiped out. Isn't that so?

"You see it's like this," he continued, wearily holding his forehead. "The Captain Vèron is in the French service, as you knew, the significance of which we, William, possibly failed to recognize down below there. He, it seemed, somewhat mistook our characters and endeavored, he tells me, to frighten us away from exploring in this direction."

He smiled contemptuously.

"Then when he realized that we—er—reacted in a different manner he was compelled to report the circumstances to the French authorities, who ordered him to remain with us as—er—secret-service agent, you understand, at the same time dispatching a powerful column in order to secure the territory for France."

Neither Billy nor I said anything, but looked at Vèron, who was standing some few feet away staring across the town toward the sound of the firing, which had increased in volume, through his Zeiss glasses.

"I quite see his point of view. Had we been successful, as you know, the country would have become nominally British. These international jealousies—I'm afraid the rest is somewhat obvious."

We three remained silent.

"Hardwicke was right!" exclaimed Billy. "What has happened to him?"

"Killed, as far as Vèron could find out, by those *sumpitan* people."

"And Thorpe?" said I.

"Sacrificed a long while ago as we were to have been today."

"Why the —— did Vèron desert us at the first village?" demanded Billy with a touch of anger.

"Orders, so I understand, to foment discord in order to attract attention from the French advance from the Sudan—the east, you know. He it was, apparently, who assisted the amiable Sabah to secure converts. Very able man undoubtedly. Oh, by the way, I understand that he is empowered to offer us some consideration—concessions of some sort. How d'you fellows feel, what?"

"Nothing doing for me," said I sharply. "I guess we owe him our lives maybe, but nothing else if I know it."

"That's right," agreed Billy promptly. "After this I'll retire, for only national pirates can get away with it these days."

THE END

MEDICINES, BIG AND OTHERWISE

by Harold Lamb

WE HAVE a habit of saying that a Chinese doctor was paid as long as his patient was well: that when the patient died, the doctor was executed. It is closer to the truth, however, to say that a Chinese doctor was well paid when his pills brought good results and had to whistle for his fee when the pills failed to show results.

The best Chinese doctors until this generation had a list of some five hundred curative substances which ranged from the soft marrow of deer's horns to a fish's eye.

His Mongol cousin, on the Tatar steppe, had a simpler formula. The *lama*, who was a doctor, sometimes called *shaman*, wrote down the name of the medicine—when he did not have the medicine itself, which was most often—on a slip of paper. He moistened the paper with saliva and rolled it into a pellet which the patient swallowed in all good faith. Perhaps it did as much good as some of our own specifics.

But curing sickness in central Mongolia was—and is—sometimes a more serious matter.

If the patient was poor the *shaman* stayed long enough to eat up all the tea and mutton at hand, then said a prayer and departed. If the sick man had a little more of worldly goods, the *shaman* invited a few of his mates to share the good living.

If, however, the Mongol tribesman had a number of horses and flocks of sheep, the malady was adjudged more severe. A devil—*Tchutgour*—was in him, the patient was informed, and must be exorcised. To this end a pair of shoes should be furnished by the household, for the use of the devil in fleeing the tent—also a sheepskin-lined coat, and perhaps gloves and a fur cap.

When a wealthy Mongol ailed, the *shamans* would hastily appraise his animals and declare that this time not only was there a high-caste and malignant devil in possession, but a host of his cousins, the little elfs. So a horse must be forthcoming, fully equipped, for the chief devil to ride forth upon. Also suitable mounts for the cousins.

Since the treatment took the form of an endless chant in the face of the victim, accompanied by a raucous clamor of brazen instruments that was enough to startle Satan himself, the patient usually recovered or died within a short time.

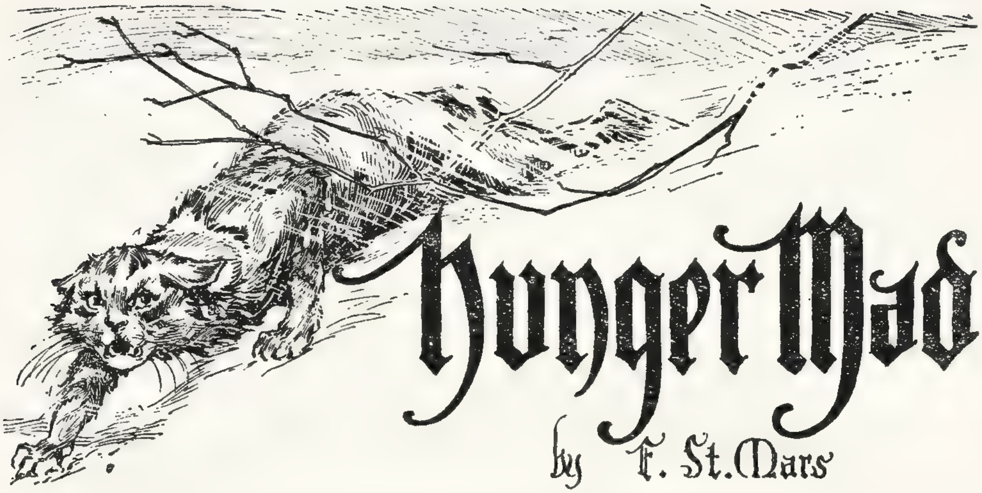
Meanwhile the head *lama* fabricated an image of the devil that possessed the patient. He made a small figure out of grass and herbs, announcing, when it was completed, that it was the demon of intermittent fevers or some such thing. When the noise was at its height the *shamans* set fire to the demon-puppet and instructed all the able members of the family to carry it outside the tent and torment the embers of the malignant spirit.

When the family returned they always found that the horse or other animal which was to serve the devil had vanished—sure proof that the evil spirit had taken its departure!

As late as the middle of the last century a *shaman* of one of the southeastern Mongol tribes set up in trade with a trained bear. The bear was used as follows: The patient was obliged to put his face close to the animal's muzzle. If the bear bit him, the demon of sickness that had afflicted him was frightened away. If the bear did not bite him, then no demon was present.

It might be expected that even the simple-minded Mongols would distrust their medical practitioners if the patients died. But the *shamans* had a formula for that contingency.

If the patient recovered, all very well; if he died, was it not proof that the demon of sickness had left him, and that he himself had been transported to a happier sphere?



Hunger Mad

by F. St. Mars

Author of "Goomasaka Makes Good," "The Anti-Hustler," etc.

SOME one has said that, in the wild, half the creatures spend their time in killing, and the other half in avoiding being killed. This is trying. Misty, the wildcat, however, belonged to neither the one half nor the other, but to both; and he had his paws full.

Misty lay out along the grained limb of a fir-tree and listened, in the almost religious silence, to the soft soughing of the north wind among the tufted tree-tops. Down below, all around him, everything was as still as in a grotto; but he knew what the north wind was saying, all the same—"Snow! Snow! Snow!" ever so softly, to itself. And indeed the dazzling purity of newly fallen snow already covered the ground between the trees below, as it were a carpet for the gods.

Then suddenly the immemorial silence of the forest was broken by a faint but growing whimper, as if great swords were being whirled very quickly high aloft in the cold gray sky. It grew and grew with great swiftness, till it seemed to fill the whole scene.

Misty glanced up quickly with his sinister green eyes and stared at the five great spotted white forms of wild swans heading south. A flicker seemed to cross his inscrutable orbs. He appeared to be calculating whether they would stop to rest upon the lake a mile away. He listened, and presently the musical beat of their huge sharp wings ceased. They were volplaning down.

Misty arose and stretched himself languidly, cynically.

He was only about three feet long from tip to tip, and a foot of that tail, that wildcat "Tom"—no tame wild, or wild tame cat—and the biggest of those swans would not be less than sixty inches. It was a hefty proposition to take on; but Misty's hunger, sharpened by cold upon the grindstone of a forty-eight hours' fast, was a heftier one.

He paused, appeared to make some calculation again, then lightly leaped down; but scarcely had he slouched a dozen yards when a great commotion in the forest back behind dropped him flat to the snow as if his legs had been pulled from under him.

It was almost like the burst and rush of a rocket, that racket, but something must have made it. Misty knew that; knew, too, that only one could—a full-grown cock capercaillie, perhaps of sixteen pounds weight, the heavyweight feathered champion of the woods in fact, taking wing.

Rapidly the noise grew, and growing, approached.

Misty never blinked an eyelid even, but watched—watched while the mighty black-green bird came sailing and rocking along overhead, checked, volplaned, and slid down.

Then Misty put in the finest stalk of his life; and the beast that can stalk a full-grown cock capercaillie in light snow deserves watching. Nobody however watched Misty's gray and dark-striped nondescript form creep, creep, creeping, nearer by inches, nearer by fractions of inches, nearer for half an hour almost unnoticeably—unless it was an ermine from a fallen tree wishing he could do the same—till the final lightning rush, when Misty flashed from patience and slowness personified to speed incarnate in one streaking dash.

Up went the capercaillie cock like a bursting land mine.

Up went Misty—a fine jump, that—like a flung boomerang, clutched, clawed, bit, gripped, and returned to earth, all mixed up in a heap, with the giant bird on top. A terrific flurry followed, all around and among the tree-boles, a revolving chaos of fur and feather, and the ermine on his windfall danced. Then the ermine *froze.*

Without warning, as certainly without sound, a great gray ball came bouncing along over the snow. It was part and on top of that whirligig of cat and bird in a breath.

The ermine snarled and fled.

Followed a scream, an explosion of snarls, and—there was Misty, bleeding and amazed, recovering from a side-leap a yard away from the cock capercaillie, over whose dead body stood a most splendid specimen of a male lynx.

Bob-tailed, bearded, tuft-eared, huge-pawed, fierce-eyed, the big cat—far bigger than Misty—stood inscrutably regarding Misty, who was still half-wondering whether it was the capercaillie's wing, the lynx's paw that hit him, or what.

You know how cats can stare. These two glared at each other, and glared, while the silence got deeper and deeper, and snow began to fall all about.

Presumably it was the lynx that had put up the capercaillie in the first place, sprung at him on the branch of a tree likely, and, hearing him resettle had come on.

Misty, one-sided to the foe, magnified by bristling, all on tiptoe, was moaning softly, not from pain, but rage. Suddenly he stopped. His eyes narrowed, then widened. He bunched his limbs—looking now past the lynx rather than at him. He sprang for the nearest tree, spitting like a spark-plug.

THERE was a rush upon the snow. Half a dozen long, lean gray shapes seemed to shoot out of nowhere. Fangs whiter than snow were snapping about everywhere. Bushy tails waved and whirled.

The lynx had had no warning, but thousands of years of dodging dog had taught his kind to know the wolf-pack's wild rush when it came. No time immediately to get the nearest tree; besides, the cat fiend was in it already. The lynx was here, there, and everywhere. The scuffle was like sparking electricity.

And those wolves were hunger mad too, but so quick—nay, so instant—was the lynx that not one of the lathering, ravening, slobbering beasts laid hold of him before he shot from right among them up a neighboring tree a dozen yards away.

The wolves never checked, never seemed to stop going. They whirled about; there was a "gathering together of three or four" at a gallop over the capercaillie. Then no capercaillie. Then—no wolves. They had gone, as swiftly and silently as they came. Misty did not wait to learn the intentions of his greater kinsman; they might include him in place of the bird. He slipped down from his tree—on the other, or blind, side, of course—and crept off. His course was toward the lake. He remembered the swans, and upon arrival found them grazing along the edge.

Little cold waves ruffled the water, and "cat's-paws" played across it. The snow made a ghostly whispering sound as it struck the surface. The five great white swans—"whooper swans," to give them their exact name—were quite alone, for all the other wild fowl had already gone south and by west, retreating, as they had to do every Autumn, before the snow.

From a tangle of tufted heather the wildcat watched them for about half an hour. He was not alone in his watching, since one fox, a mink, and two other wildcats were from various points doing the same thing, all blissfully unconscious of each other, all watering at the mouth with brains focused upon the swans.

Finally one of the two other wildcats began his stalk, hugging folds in the ground, tufts of deer-grass, scraps of ling, stones even, with such science that beyond a few yards he could not be seen.

Then the fox got to business; but his method was different. He attempted no concealment; it seemed useless with the swans right there in the open. He trotted toward them calmly; not directly, but obliquely. Nor did he look at them directly, only obliquely with his oblique eyes. He appeared either not to see them, or to care not if he did.

He aped the appearance of a full-fed fox; and rarely do the wild hunters slay if full-fed. The swans would know the fact. Upon that he based his strategy. Anon he stopped to roll. Once he sat down to scratch. It was a white light upon the intelligence of the animal.

The mink, long, lithe, low and wet, got in on his fine work last. His medium was the water. He took careful bearings and slipped into the depths. If he appeared again at all, like an attacking submarine, it was but to correct his location, showing only eyes and nose.

Misty did not see any of these competitors stalking his dinner exactly, except the fox, but he saw their ears. At least, he saw the ears of his two confrères, and knew in some unaccountable way that one pair belonged to a wildcat male, and, which was more important, that the other pair was a wildcat female's.

With a voiceless snarl Misty's head seemed to twist all up like a shriveled apple. He appeared to have lost his ears. He seemed to convulse slowly. Then—then he let himself go.

It was an extraordinary move; and it showed fine, bold daring, as well as intelligence equal, after all, to that of the fox.

The heads of the swans were up from time to time, watching the fox. He seemed harmless enough, full-fed, doubtless coming for a drink. Still they watched, yet were letting him get within range for a rush.

The other wildcats they failed to detect. The mink also.

And Misty was almost upon them before anybody realized that he existed at all, even. He had relied upon that and his noiseless speed; had risked all upon their concentration elsewhere.

Instantly the fox dashed in; the other male wildcat followed; the mink fairly swirled through the water.

And the swans lost their heads—all save one. The old male swan, leader of the flock, rushed straight out at Misty.

Swans, by reason of their great weight, can rise only very slowly and gradually. Perhaps it was this fact that made that grand old bird decide in a flash to fight; or perhaps his temper prevailed.

Anyhow all Misty knew as he rushed in was that he could hear the fox just behind him; could glimpse the other male wildcat on his right; sense the water and the mink on his left, and *see*—very much see—the magnificent old cock swan in front. He could almost feel their hate, and was suddenly and very painfully aware that he had not the least desire to come into contact with any of them at all. Surprize, after all, was his game, not being surprized.

Yet what he did was rather fine. Just when there seemed no way out, he discovered one—upward.

It was a grand leap—clean, straight, and high into the air; a remarkable bound.

The fox unwillingly shot straight beneath into the swan, received the full force of that swan's terrific wing-stroke on the side of his head, and knew no more.

The other wildcat got the back swing of that wing, and was lifted clean off his feet.

THE mink—the mink saw something, some huge bronze barb fall from the sky, and—dived back to the depths for his life.

The female wildcat, who had left cover only a little way, watching her lover, exploded with great suddenness, and leaped back. She had seen two bronze barbs shooting down through the falling snow with a velocity that left a hissing sound upon the air louder than her own. Truly it is the looker-on that sees most of the game.

Landed in safety, she blinked, spun about, and looked. Then she looked some more—her eyes very wide.

And this is what she saw.

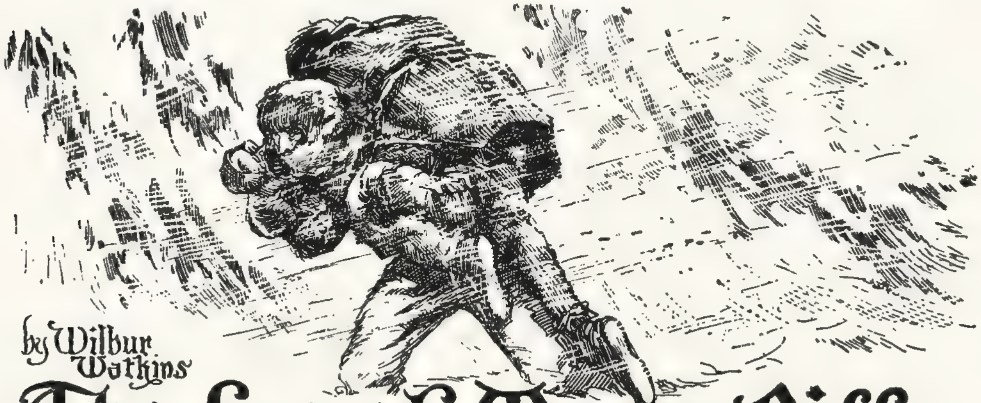
Misty, grappling like a tortured fiend, was rising slowly to heaven, close trussed in the appalling talons of an enormous golden eagle,* the other wildcat was fighting his last fight in the grip of another golden eagle's talons on the ground; the fox was lying all anyhow in the snow, with a broken neck; the mink was nowhere to be seen; and far across the lake, threshing foam like paddle-wheel steamers, the swans were slowly rising, and gaining speed as they rose, on a long, long slant into the sky.

Then the she wildcat turned back slowly into the forest, and yawned superciliously as she went. She cared nothing for lovers at that season, but everything for life. There had been too many hunters, and too few hunted, in that place for some time.

---

* Wildcats are the favorite food of the golden eagle.

If Nature insisted upon adjusting the balance in her own grim way—why, there was one old she wildcat who did not mind. Things would be easier for a bit now, and competition less keen. Hope of living through the Winter now could be revived; and as for the dear departed—well, never mind. Nature was all-wise.



by Wilbur Watkins

The Leg of Moose Bill

Author of "The End of the Trail."

"THE North will never get me."

Many times had I heard "Moose" Bill make that declaration; and it was not a brag, but the simple statement of a firm belief born of his many years' experience in the Arctic and a consciousness of his own almost superhuman strength and endurance. He defied the life-crushing cold of the Northern Winters as a man might defy an enemy whom he respects but does not fear. He knew that the Frost King like a sly assassin forever lurked on his trail, patiently awaiting the moment when his vigilance might relax, then to strike him down or leave him a maimed and helpless cripple for the remainder of his life.

He never took a chance with the cold and had little patience with those who did—the unfortunate chechakos who through their ignorance of northern woodcraft lost fingers and toes and sometimes legs during their first Winter on the trap-line.

"Boneheads," he called them; "trying to beat Jack Frost at his own game when they don't savvy the first rules."

All of us at the fur-trading town of Beaver in those days concurred in Bill's opinion—the North, indeed, would never get him.

As my boat swept around the bend of the river that July night, and I saw the town again for the first time in five tumultuous years, my mind was busy with speculations as to what changes I might find there. Alaskan fur towns I knew altered slowly in appearance; in population alone is a change perceptible from year to year, and I was prepared to find many absentees from my former list of acquaintances.

But I was thoroughly surprized to note at first glance a huge log building on the upstream edge of town. It was new, the fresh-peeled logs glistening white in the slanting rays of the midnight sun against the black background of spruce forest, in sharp contrast to the drab and brown of the other buildings, some of which had stood there for forty years or more.

As I swept nearer a large sign on the front of the building, "Beaver Trading-Post," became visible, and I wondered which one of my old friends of the trap-line might have so prospered as to establish a trading-business in such an imposing structure.

A line of faces—the brown of Indians with here and there a white—topped the high cut-bank in front of town, and peered eagerly down to learn who the newcomer might be as my boat drew in and grounded on the narrow, sandy beach. The first man I recognized was Moose Bill. He stood there bareheaded, his round, bald dome, brown as a mink, protruding above the crowd around him, glistening in the sun like a weather-beaten boulder on a moss-covered hilltop.

Five years apparently had wrought no change in his features; it was the same wind-toughened face that I remembered, the skin seared with innumerable tiny lines but unmarred by scars of frost-bite; and his eyes, which had never known snowblindness, were still as alert and bright as those of an ermine. As he stood in that nondescript crowd, like a lone spruce in a clump of tamarack, he might have passed for a man of thirty-five; but I knew that Moose Bill had already seen his fiftieth birthday.

He bawled out a boisterous welcome when he recognized me, shoved his way through the crowd and scrambled down the bank—hobbled, I should say, for his right leg from the knee down was replaced by a wooden peg.

For a moment I did not believe my eyes. Moose Bill with a wooden leg! It seemed almost inconceivable. Yet the leg was gone, and my surprize was so evident that Bill burst forth with a hearty laugh.

"Economy!" he bawled, striking the birch peg with his cane. "Cuts down expense in these hard times—a pair of moccasins lasts twice as long now! Haw, haw!"

Of how the misfortune came upon him he told me nothing as we walked up the street toward the road-house, and I did not inquire; neither did I speak a word of the sympathy which I felt, but knew would not be welcome. I wondered how Bill, a trapper only, now managed to earn a living when shorn of his sole working capital, his bodily strength. From old "Husky Jim" Haley, a one-time doctor of divinity, now postmaster and champion story-teller of Beaver, I learned the details of Moose Bill's misfortune.

"Yep, the North finally got him," Jim declared as we sat alone in his cabin and discussed old times.

Then he told me the story:

IT HAPPENED two years back. The freeze-up was early that Fall, but the first snow was very late—not a flake until past the middle of November, when it seemed to come all at once, in one big, blinding storm, and with it the worst cold-snap the country ever saw.

Bill was at his trapping-grounds about sixty miles up the Novak, but when no snow came after the freeze-up, and he could not string his traps, he took a jaunt down to Beaver and laid around for several days waiting for the weather to change.

One morning he arose and found a cold, stiff breeze blowing down from the North.

"She's coming," he declared, and rolled his pack and lit out for home.

He was traveling light—a robe, frypan, ax, rifle, grub for three days and an extra pair of moccasins and socks. Extra foot harness was almost a religion with Bill. He might have started out on a mush without grub, but extra moccasins and socks were always a part of his pack.

"Keep your feet dry and you'll never need crutches."

That was Bill's motto, and he lived it on the trail.

Bill covered about half the distance to his Novak camp the first day and "Siwashed" for the night between two fires. It had turned bitter cold and was snowing a little when he got up the next morning—hard, dry pellets slanting down in the teeth of the cold north wind.

He was protected from the force of the storm by the timber on either hand, for he followed the Beaver-Big Creek trail cut the year before by the Berry Mining Company when old Tom Berry bought the Big Creek placer mines. But when he reached the Novak, about midday, it was necessary to turn to the right and follow up the open course of the frozen river on the last twenty-mile lap of his journey.

The storm was steadily increasing in its fury—the wind stronger, the snow thicker. Bill drew the hood of his parka close about his face and plunged ahead, bent over against the force of the gale. He had gone scarce a hundred yards when something he noticed on the ice ahead brought him to a dumfounded halt.

It was a little patch of snow packed hard by the pressure of a human foot. He dropped to his knees and examined the track, and from his lips there burst a vehement stream of curses. The tiny corrugations in the compressed snow informed him that the foot which tramped it down was encased in a rubber shoe-pac.

"Rubber! Rubber at this time of year!" he fumed. "Of all the infernal chechalkers this bird takes the cake!"

ARCTIC OCEAN
ASIA
BERING STRAIT
ALASKA
YUKON RIVER
DOMINION OF CANADA
YUKON
BRITISH COLUMBIA
BERING SEA
BRISTOL BAY
COOK INLET
PACIFIC OCEAN
SCALE

Bill's anger and disgust could have been no greater had the man offended directly against him. But in addition to informing him that the man was a stranger in the North, the track also told him that the man was lost—was headed up-river he knew not where.

Bill lowered his head and rushed on like a mad bull; he ran, following the tracks, hoping to overtake the man before the storm drove him to the shelter of the timber. Several times the tracks turned into the bank and out again, and Bill knew the fellow was looking for dry wood with which to build a fire.

He raced ahead, confident of finding him in the first patch of dead timber. The tracks again turned up the bank, and Bill followed and came upon his man huddled at the base of a big birch, vainly trying to set fire to a heap of green spruce boughs. He wore no parka, but a heavy coonskin overcoat enveloped his short, squat figure, and a beaver cap topped his head. His plump, round face was bare, and the nose, the chin and the points of the cheeks were as white as the snow on the ground.

"Nice day, stranger," Bill greeted him.

The man sprang to his feet and cried out wildly:

"Oh, my ——, I'm freezing! A fire, quick! Help me light a fire!"

His eyes were dilated with terror, and his voice quaked with the fear of death.

"Want a fire, eh! Well, why in —— don't you light something that'll burn!"

Bill ripped a strip of bark from the trunk of the birch and stuck a match to it. It flared up like powder, and in less than thirty seconds he had a roaring fire going.

"My feet are freezing," the little man whined.

"Huh, that's strange! Kick off them —— rubbers and be quick about it."

Bill examined the feet and grunted his approval.

"Nipped a little, but not bad yet. Crawl into these."

He passed the other man his extra pair of moccasins. "Now rub your face with snow."

"My face don't hurt any more. It's all right."

"Rub it, I say. It's froze hard as a bone!"

"Oh, I guess it's all right."

Bill sprang in front of him with doubled fists.

"Now see here, 'Shorty,' if I've gotta mother you out of this mess you're goin' to do as I say! Rub that face!"

Shorty was cowed by the threatening attitude of the big man and immediately began to rub, but howled with pain when the blood again began to circulate through the frost-nipped flesh. Bill stood over him and laughed and verbally abused him as an ignoramus and a quitter.

Shorty explained that he had left the Big Creek camp two days ago and was headed for Beaver, intending to go with the first mail-team to Fairbanks.

Bill fixed a comfortable camp—a lean-to of spruce boughs with a green-log fire in front—and they spent the night there. The next morning the wind had subsided, and the snow, too, had ceased; but the cold was even more intense.

Bill knew by the sullen, black-clouded sky overhead that it was only a lull in the storm. The last of his provisions were consumed for breakfast, and he knew that they must push on toward his camp without delay before additional snow came to impede travel further.

* * *

WHEN daylight was bright overhead they started out—Bill plowing through the snow ahead, Shorty following behind, his only pack a double-barreled shotgun slung across his arm. Bill tried to persuade him to leave this behind.

"You got no use for that blunderbuss," he declared, "and you'll need every ounce of strength you got to keep your legs moving before we hit camp tonight."

But Shorty kept his gun.

The moment the two men emerged on to the river a flock of ravens swept up from a clump of spruce and followed them, circling back and forth above their heads with a swish of wings, and their strange, sepulchral croak sounding like the gurgle of water poured from a bottle. For three hours the birds hovered above them, now sweeping down to almost within arm's reach and then mounting high in the air, their black bodies but faintly discernible against the somber sky. And ever the air rang with their melancholy cries.

The ravens got on Shorty's nerves; he began to curse them soundly and tried to frighten them away by brandishing his gun when they swept down close. Once he threw the weapon to his shoulder intending to shoot; but Bill stopped him with a quick command.

"Cut that out, chechalker!" he ordered. "Don't you know better'n to shoot at them birds? It's bad luck to kill a raven. They are the souls of dead trappers."

Shorty laughed derisively at Bill's superstition.

"I don't care a hang whose souls they are," he declared, "the next one that tries to knock my cap off will get blowed to smithereens."

They took a short cut through a neck of woods and came out on a back-water slough. The croaking birds, following over the treetops, once more swept low to the men. Shorty threw up his gun and fired.

"Ha, ha! There's one of your —— black souls!" he laughed as one of the birds plumped like a stone to the ice.

He ran out to one side to examine it. Bill trudged on straight ahead until a moment later a distant, muffled cry caused him to turn quickly. Shorty was nowhere in sight. Again the muffled cry, and Bill ran back in the direction from whence it came.

Shorty's shotgun lay in the snow across a round, black hole in the ice, and the screams of Shorty emanated from below. Bill looked down and saw him. The slough was dry. The crust of ice had frozen in the Fall, and the water beneath had seeped away, and Shorty was buried to his waist in the mud and slime on the bottom.

By the help of a slender pole Bill rescued him from the mud, carried him to the timber and kindled a fire. Shorty howled with pain, declaring that his leg was broken.

Bill determined, however, that his only injury was a sprained ankle, the result of his impact with the frozen surface of the mud on the bottom. But at any rate Shorty was unable to walk and was wet from his waist down. An hour was spent in drying clothes, and by that time it had commenced to snow again.

Bill knew they were in a bad mess. He was faced by the prodigious task of carrying the contemptible Shorty to camp or leaving him there to die. They could not remain there, for they had no food; and every hour of delay added to the difficulty of travel. They must go at once.

But Shorty's moccasins were not yet dry. For another half-hour Bill held them before the fire. When the steam no longer rose from the damp moosehide he decided they would do; he would take a chance. He took off his own dry moccasins and threw them in Shorty's face.

"You ornery, boneheaded skunk," he growled, "I ought to leave you here—for the birds to feed on your dirty carcass. Get into those moccasins."

Shorty, cowering in the folds of his big overcoat, meekly complied, and Bill put on the damp footgear. When their feet were dressed he threw Shorty across his back as he might have shouldered a quarter of meat, and set off once more up the river.

In a very short while the moccasin on his right foot was as stiff as a wooden shoe.

"Huh," he muttered, "was afraid of that."

He did not pause but kept on, wriggling his toes vigorously. The foot in the frozen moccasin began to pain him. Darkness fell, and he still trudged on. Shorty put up a pitiful plea to stop—he was freezing to death—the pain in his ankle was killing him—but Bill was deaf to his pleading, for his own mind was tortured by a great uncertainty.

His right foot had been cold, very cold, but now it no longer hurt. Had it warmed up, or was it numb? Somehow it did not feel like the other. Was that heavy, dead feeling the result of his tremendous exertion or was it—— He forced the horrible thought from his mind and staggered on in the darkness. The man on his back continued to moan and the falling snow like an evil wraith enveloped him, filled his eyes and his nostrils, and piled in ever deepening drifts across the way ahead.

A MAN less versed in woodcraft than Moose Bill might have found it difficult to locate his cabin in the storm and darkness even when he arrived opposite it, but Bill was not to be fooled. At exactly the right place he turned off from the river, dragged himself and his burden up the bank and into the cabin. He was home at last. He threw Shorty on to the bunk and built a fire in the sheet-iron stove, filled the coffee-pot with chopped ice, and put a loaf of bread and a chunk of meat into the oven to thaw.

Then he sat down and felt of his numb foot. It was indeed numb. He cut the strings of the moccasin and bared the foot. The flesh from the ankle down was as hard and cold as the foot of a marble statue. He fetched a pan of snow, placed the foot in it and began to rub vigorously.

Shorty raised up on the bed and threw off his overcoat.

"Oh, ——, I'm hungry!" he whined. "Can't you bring me something to eat?"

"Keep your shirt on! There'll be some grub ready in a minute."

Bill continued to rub his foot. For many moments he worked at it steadily. Shorty again became impatient.

"What you doing? Did your toes get nipped?"

"Reckon they did."

Bill ceased rubbing the foot and again examined it, pinching it here and there and bending the toes with his fingers. Finally he drew the sock back on and went about preparing supper.

For hours that night the sleepless Shorty, writhing with the pain of his injured ankle, listened to the breathing of the big man beside him and envied Moose Bill his deep, untroubled sleep.

Several times the following day Bill removed his moccasin and examined the injured foot. Shorty noticed that he limped when he placed it to the floor.

"Toes hurt you?" he inquired.

"Yep. Some."

"Well, you can thank your stars you haven't got a sprained ankle. You'd know what real pain was if you did have."

Toward evening Bill took an old handsaw from a peg on the wall and spent an hour filing it and cleaning the rust from the sides.

That night it was Bill who writhed in pain, and Shorty fretted peevishly because it kept him awake. When morning came Bill got up and prepared breakfast for Shorty. He ate nothing himself. Shorty saw that his right foot was swathed in a cloth, and that he hobbled painfully about the room.

"You look sick," he remarked. "How are the toes coming?"

"They are coming, and —— quick too. Can you get up today?"

"Guess I could if necessary."

"Well, it's necessary. Roll out and get your clothes on."

With a great deal of grumbling Shorty sat on the edge of the bunk dressing when he noticed Bill put a pan of water on the stove and place the old saw in it.

"What the deuce are you up to now?"

"You and I are going to do a little butchering today," Bill answered with a sickly grin, and began to whet a razor.

"Butchering! Are you crazy? Where's there anything to butcher——"

He suddenly started upright to his feet entirely forgetful of the injured ankle in the horror of the thought that had burst upon him.

"Let me see—let me see— Your foot! Oh, my God!"

Bill had drawn away the cloth and exposed to view his frozen foot, swollen to twice its normal size and a ghastly blue-black in color. Shorty sank back groaning upon the bed and buried his face in the robes. Bill calmly went on with his honing.

When the water in the pan boiled he placed the razor in it and called to Shorty. The only answer was another groan. Bill snatched a stick of wood from the pile back of the stove and heaved it against Shorty's ribs.

"Come out of that, you white-livered runt. None of your baby antics go around here!"

"No, no! I won't! I can't do it! You sha'n't do it—it isn't necessary—I'll get a doctor!"

"Another blat out of you and I'll cave your head in!"

Bill hobbled toward the bed, the handle of a huge double-bitt ax clutched in his hands.

"Get up now, and do as I say. It's got to be done—done now. Tomorrow will be too late."

Shorty did as he was told. Bill climbed on to the bed and leaned the ax beside it. At his directions Shorty placed a clean strip of canvas beneath him, fetched a roll of bandages from a chest in a corner and helped fasten a rawhide band about the injured leg which they twisted tight with a short stick.

"Now bring the razor. Cut in there and there and——"

But Shorty's nerve was gone. His hands were trembling and beyond control.

Moose Bill took the razor from him and himself cut into the blackened flesh. Shorty sank in a moaning heap on the floor. When the bone was exposed Bill again spoke, between clenched teeth—

"Get the saw."

Shorty brought the saw, but again fell in a heap on the floor—

"I can't! I can't!" he moaned.

"For God's sake, man, saw! You're killing me!"

Shorty only groaned. Bill swung the big ax above his head.

"Saw, —— you, saw! I'll split you in two!"

Fear of death alone gave Shorty nerve and strength to draw the blade back and forth until the blackened foot came free.

Eight days later an Indian from the Cobuck Village, stringing a trap-line down the Novak, found them there and hauled them down to Beaver. Bill was well on the road to recovery.

* * *

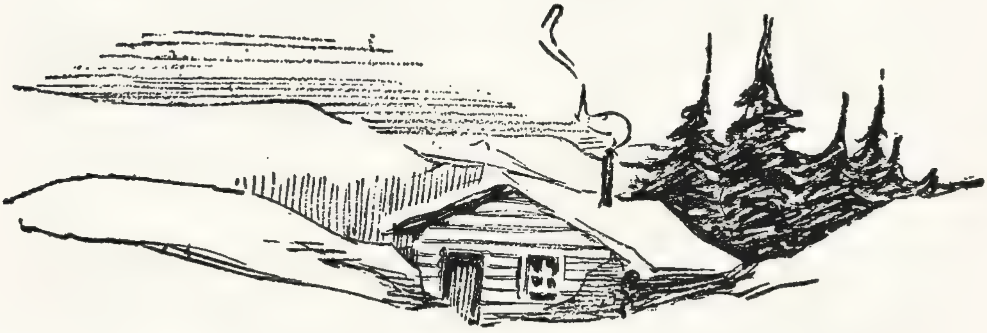
"AND the doctor pronounced it a plumb good amputation," old Jim finished. "Just a little trimming here and there was all the additional carving necessary. Shorty went on to Fairbanks with the first outgoing mail-team, and Bill has never seen him since."

"Never seen or heard from him since!" I mused sarcastically. "Well, I guess that's about the usual run of human appreciation. Poor old Bill! How the deuce does he make a living now?"

"Oh, I never said he hadn't heard from the runt," Old Jim corrected me. "And Bill don't have to work. He owns the new trading-post up yonder, and two more like it on the Porcupine. He's mighty well heeled.

"You see, about three months after Shorty left, Bill got a letter from him from Frisco—a mushy sort of thing thanking Bill for what he'd done—didn't amount to anything—but pinned to it was a check signed 'Thomas Berry.'

"That saphead Shorty person happened to be the son of the new owner of the Big Creek mines. The check was to the amount of thirty thousand dollars. Shucks! I'd cash in one of my old pegs for half of that."



The Fenceless Meadows

A Complete Novelette

by Bill Adams

Author of "The Bosun of the Goldenhorn's *Yarn," "A Debt at Sea," etc.*

I

THE *Fancy Nan* was at anchor, off the Howard Street wharf, San Francisco, ready for sea. Upon the wharf were gathered her crew, waiting for the boat to take them aboard. The boat had gone off to the ship, taking the owner and his daughter, and was now on her way back.

At the cabin table sat the owner and the skipper. Mr. Tattersall, the skipper, a thin old fish—a scarred whale bearing the marks of many years' seafaring; appearing about to speak, but silent; his face wrinkled by the winds and weather stress of all the oceans; graying about the temples, with a small iron-gray beard and stiff mustache; his cold and penetrating eyes watching the owner with a restless expression; his large ears, pressed close against his head, as if by the everlasting winds of the sea, seeming to listen carefully both to what his owner was saying and to the sounds that came from the deck without; his hands, thin-fingered and sharp-knuckled, folded upon the table before him.

Dowser, his owner, leaned across the table toward him. Dowser was bald; a stout man with folds of florid skin about his clean-shaven face; large eyes and prominently blue, with, in them, a strangely mournful expression. Unlike his six-foot skipper, a short man—his sailors calling him "cut off and hammered down"—short-armed, with fat fingers; wearing across his vest a heavy gold watch-chain, ornamented with a row of shark's teeth set in gold fittings; a man of advanced years, looking backward rather than forward, along life; wearing, as he faced his skipper, an expression that seemed apologetic.

"Shoofly," he said, "it's up to you."

"Women's out of place on a ship," replied the other. "You know it, Dowser, or you ought to know it." He stopped suddenly, adding in a low voice—

"I don't forget the old *Nanette*, sir."

Dowser, bowing his head, sat silent; and directly, half-rising, held out a hand.

"Shoofly," he said, "you don't think I forget? But this is different."

The skipper took the proffered hand and for a moment they stood with hands clasped above the table.

"Mr. Dowser, I don't forget that you are my owner—any more than I forgot that you were my skipper in the old *Nanette*, sir. Orders are orders."

"I wish you'd cut out the 'sir,' Shoofly. I wish you'd be more human."

Pausing a moment he added—

"I don't know how you and Nance will hit it off if you can't be more human."

Turning, he led the way up through the chart house to the poop. Against the taffrail, beside the signal-halyards, leaned a girl, seeming, despite the skipper's words, by no means out of place there; seeming,

---

"The Fenceless Meadows," copyright, 1922, by B. M. Adams.

indeed, at home with the wind in her hair; her eyes, very wide and open, and of a strange greenish-blue, matching the lights upon the water beneath the morning sun; her arms resting outstretched upon the taffrail; her whole body appearing, as the ship beneath her feet, to be ready, and awaiting a gay adventure.

"Nance," said the owner, stepping out on deck, "Mr. Tattersall figures that it's up to you to bring him luck."

Nance Dowser laughed, a laugh like the distant murmur of a strong wind on the sea.

"Oh! yes—I guess," she cried, and added —"I bet Mr. Tattersall loves me like he loves fog when he's making a landfall."

The two men went to the bridge. The crew were coming aboard, climbing over the railing, hauling sea-chests and sea-bags after them; shouting to each other; laughing and swearing—some morose and silent; some cursing the boarding-master, the ship and the sea. Shouldering their dunnage, they betook themselves forward and, tossing their belongings into the fo'csle, stood about the foredeck talking noisily of the shore, the girls and of their last ships.

Leaning over the bridge rail, the skipper called to his mate—

"Heave in, sir."

The hands swarmed upon the fo'csle head, shipping the windlass bars and laying their weight upon them; their feet stamping rhythmically, one of them rousing a chantey —an old song of the sea; the rest lifting the refrain, sending it echoing over the bay; so that the people on the ferry-steamers crowded to the rails to watch and to listen.

Dowser went to the poop and the girl, throwing her arms around his neck, cried—

"Pa, I wish you were coming too."

"Aye, so do I, my girl," he answered her.

An old man, a thin, white-bearded, cadaverous fellow, put his head out of the chart-house door and seeing them touched his finger to his forehead.

"Moses," cried Dowser, "I leave her in your charge."

The old man, stepping from the chart-house, stood before them; looking at Dowser, he said—

"She'll come back, all well—never you fear, sir."

The owner, taking his daughter's hands in his, pressed them close; stooping to kiss her; the girl gazing over the water, wiping her eyes—the sun flashing red strands in her blown brown hair; the ship swaying a little, beneath her feet—dancing to the tides of morning.

"I must be going," he said.

Turning, he hurried from the poop; and calling to his skipper, "Good luck!" disappeared over the ship's side into the waiting boat; to sit watching the ship gather way, her numbers all aflutter at her peak, the ripple swirling about her forefoot; and, catching sight of Moses at the chart-house door, to cry, once more—

"Good luck."

The tug snorted at the tow-line, and the bark, slipping toward the heads, men sprang aloft, loosing white topsails to flap in the salty wind.

II

IT WAS back in those early years just before Nance Dowser was born. For eighteen days the ship *Nanette* lay becalmed within a degree of the line; the sea motionless, the sky pitilessly blue—no cloud drifting across its hopeless infinity; the sun beating down fiercely upon the decks of the *Nanette;* her sails clewed up, hanging in idle folds from the spars. Under an awning that stretched from side to side of the poop, hidden from the deck by walls of canvas, lay a woman whose strength was ebbing away.

The silence was complete; broken only when, the wheel relieved, the departing helmsman repeated the course to the officer on the bridge—the course a farce, the ship swinging with the ocean currents.

By night the voice of the lookout man, reporting from the fo'csle head, crying along the moonlit deck— "A-l-l-l-l-l-s well, sir," alone disturbed the ghostly silence of the limpid moonlit sea.

Two hours after Nance Dowser came into the world the woman whose name was borne by the becalmed ship died—as a star that dips under the sea rim. That midnight the lookout man was silent, and the helmsman, stealing from the poop, whispered the course.

When dawn came they buried her, lowering her gently from the quarter-railing, wrapped in white canvas; the hands gathering silent, upon the quarter-deck, waiting, respectfully, with bowed heads, till the closing of the little book from which the mate, unused to reading, mumbled one brief prayer; Captain Dowser beside him, staring across the unpitying sea.

It was Moses, the sea-cook, till then the butt of the whole ship's company, who took the child in charge; holding her in his sinewy arms, smiling into her tiny face, while the people of the sea stood by, perplexed and wondering.

Three days after the birth of Nance Dowser the calm broke—three days through which the sea-cook never left the child; Dowser looking hungrily on, helpless, enslaved to an old cook whose every order he hastened to obey; Tattersall, the mate, taking charge of the ship, bringing her to port, with a skipper whose mind seemed to have gone from all save his child.

The ship, coming to anchorage, he hastened with his little sea-born daughter to see the doctors—fearful of some mischance in her rough nursing. The doctors smiled at him, saying:

"Keep her at sea, captain. She's as strong as one of your topsails."

Dowser, a grim horror of the sea upon him, took his ship seaward again—Moses with him.

Close to her second birthday, going to sea once more, he vowed that it should be for the last time; and, when she was four, coming again to anchor off the ferries, turning his ship and all her business over to his mate, he quit the sea.

Tattersall put the ship in drydock, gave her a complete overhaul, and chartered her for Europe.

Dowser, with his little daughter and the old cook, settled beside the water-front at Alameda where, for a month, romping upon the lawn, gathering flowers and sailing to and from the ship with her father and old Moses, the child seemed happy.

She had one doll—an iron-headed thing presented to her by Moses on her third birthday, and long since rebuilt as to arms and legs and trunk—only the iron head remaining indestructible; calling for other needs upon her imagination, and living in a world peopled by folk of strange names invented by herself; seeming to care but little for the company of other children, and at times avoiding them. The doll was named after Moses; and doll Moses and cook Moses were of an importance not surpassed by Dowser himself.

As the weeks passed, the ship preparing for her voyage, the little girl grew less willing to leave after each day spent on board with her father or with Moses—days spent in running here and there about the cabins, up and down the accommodation ladders, shouting to imaginary sailors upon the masts, and calling down the hatches to invisible inhabitants of the between decks' holds.

The time for sailing drawing near, it became evident that she would fret for the ship; for her time between visits was spent in eager anticipation of the delightful company of the unseen crews with which she had peopled the vessel.

One day, a week before the ship was due to sail, Tattersall said:

"Captain Dowser, I reckon you'd better be getting your chest packed. We go to sea a week from today."

Sitting at the cabin table, listening to the chatter of the child upon the poop overhead, the two men stared at each other.

When the *Nanette* went through the heads Dowser was upon the bridge.

A FEW weeks after they had left the Golden Gate, one morning when the hands were washing the decks down, a sailor, coming to the mate, whispered:

"Mister, feel the main latch, sir—in the shade there, under the belly o' the mains'l."

Tattersall did so, and, going aft, blew down the speaking-tube to Dowser's cabin. Meeting him as he stepped on to the poop, he said—

"She's afire below, sir."

Dowser gave the customary orders.

"Everything battened down? Ventilators closed? How's she heading? All right we'll lay her for Pitcairn."

They laid her course for Pitcairn, a speck in the Pacific, nine hundred miles away; the breeze light, the ship fast becoming an oven, the decks almost too hot to walk upon; obtaining stores from the lazaret well nigh impossible, men lowered with ropes under their arms, grasping whatever they might lay their hands upon in the smoke-filled storeroom, and hauled back unconscious to the deck.

One morning, the wind freshening, the ship tore through the sea under full sail, her lee railing dipping deep in the wash, and the sprays flying in clouds across her decks—her hatches smoking and wisps of smoke stealing from ventilators and from tight shut skylights.

Night falling, a full moon glimmered upon the burning clipper with white crested waves rolling in upon her; her crew gathered upon the poop, waiting. with the unquestioning patience of the sea; the sails ashine in the yellow lights of midnight, porpoises gamboling beneath her bow.

Dowser took the wheel, Moses, with the child in his arms, beside him; the mate on the bridge, searching the seas for a sail.

Day came again, flaming; a tropic day ablaze above a blazing ship, the sea ahead of her hidden under wind-blown clouds of smoke—the skysails set, holding the clipper down, with her railing awash and the sea hissing around her.

Night fell upon her; the moon silvering the fires that seemed to hover over her; Nance Dowser asleep, her head on the old cook's shoulder; her father at the wheel again, hour after hour, untiring; relieved at the dawn by Tattersall to take his daughter in his arms, pressing her small cheek to his hard face, kissing her—in front of his sailors—and handing her back to old Moses.

Day breaking wide, upon a clipper burning at sea, none spoke of the life-boats—men beneath the spell of the child, the skipper's daughter; ignorant men, waiting, with the old patience of the sea.

At sundown, two miles off shore, the islanders met her, luffed to the wind, with her sails shaking. Their head-man, standing in the bow of the whale-boat hailed her, shaking his head, gesticulating, pointing beyond the horizon; her hands crowding in the mizzen-shrouds, listening, waiting for orders, wondering; watching the skipper and mate conferring together, staring at the island, and along their ship.

Dowser spoke to his mate.

"Shoofly, we can't beach her here. She'd break up in ten minutes. ——, I hate to leave her—but I can't ask 'em to stay and take a chance of getting her on a safe beach at Manga Reeva. She'd burn out there perhaps; and could perhaps be refitted and taken to sea again. ——, I hate to leave her. But I can't ask 'em to stay."

An old sailor, Reuben Sweeney, a man who from boyhood had followed the sea, a man with great arms and a vast chest, stepped forward, touching his hat, his eyes upon the skipper's daughter.

"Captain, we're with you, sir—you an' little Fancy Nan—where you says sir, we goes—all on us."

A murmur, a long breath of assent, ran among the gathered sailors—sailors of the square rigged ships.

From the arms of the old sea-cook the child waved frantically—holding doll Moses up for the islanders to see.

They squared the yards away; their feet scarce able to stand on the decks. To quick orders from the mates they answered with great shouts—singing the braces in.

The *Nanette*, paying off to clear the island, with the wind taking her at her best sailing-point, as if glorying in a new-given freedom, trampled the green seas to a smother below her lifting forefoot; the sea roaring alongside, the wind drumming in her shrouds, the islanders watching her; the old head-man, in the bow of the whale-boat, standing with his face upturned to the sky, from which stars began to flash.

The ship sped away down the green and darkening furrows, the foam creaming her wake, sea-fowl screaming about her.

Night fell and she was gone. From the summit of the island men and women watched her going—seeing a dim glow long after they had lost her in the night.

When night fell once more, the shores of Manga Reeva were rising from the sea. The ship was burning indeed now; fires breaking her decks and tongues of flame sweeping hungrily along them. The courses, foresail, mainsail and cross-jack, had been cut away and left to blow overboard. lest, reaching and feeding upon them, the fires leap to the sails above. Great columns of smoke blew from the doomed ship, hiding the furrows.

Reuben Sweeney was at the wheel, Dowser and the sea-cook with the child beside him.

The child alone had food and, ignorant of danger, knew no fear.

The wind had fallen to a light breeze, the sea rolling upon the long white beach ahead of the clipper. Captain Dowser spoke to his mate and his mate to the men.

"Stand by! She'll strike in a minute. Unless we can clear the boats it'll be every man for himself."

She struck, going ashore with a slow lurch upon the crest of a long swell; her masts, ripping out of her, going overboard with a great crash; flames shooting from her torn decks, and, met by the inrushing seas, sending clouds of steam about her, mingled with the smoke and the roar of the sea.

For a time the fires were subdued by the inrushing water.

They cleared her boats away, swinging them free, and dropping into them with quiet precision, falling upon their feet and grasping the oars; awaiting orders.

Reuben Sweeney was still at the wheel.

Dowser, speaking to him, he stretched his arms to the cook for the child.

"Doc," he said, "I ain't so old a man as you."

Moses handed her to him and, taking her in his arms, he leaped from the railing to the waiting boat and was gone, Moses following close behind.

Dowser, on the poop, turned to his mate, holding his hand out. They shook, and, with a last look along the decks of the wrecked clipper, left her to her doom.

III

WHEN in the course of time the company of the *Nanette* arrived in San Francisco, the tale of her destruction caused a wave of excitement along the water-front. There were headlines in the papers, with pictures of imaginary ships driving ashore in flames. Dowser avoided the curious as best he might. The crew were quickly scattered, and gone to sea again in other vessels.

The *Nanette* was well insured, and Dowser, already well-to-do, suffered no great financial loss in her wreck. But with the old ship a total wreck beyond the hope of salvaging, something seemed to have gone out of his life. Despite the horror of the sea that had come over him after the death of Nance's mother, as long as the *Nanette* floated there had always been a vague sense that she yet lived. Now he felt deserted and alone, and a horror of the sea came upon him with a greater intensity than before.

He settled in Alameda, renting a house near the water; often going with the child to sit upon the beach, where, as if half expecting the white topsails of the *Nanette* to rise above the sea rim, he would gaze fixedly across the bay. Moses stayed with him, doing his cooking and caring for the child.

Tattersall was lost. The sea held no horror for him, but ships were not plentiful and commands were scarce. He hung about the city, watching the shipping come and go, and frequently visiting Dowser.

One afternoon, as they sat beside the water, with Nance at play near by, they saw a little bark come in partially dismasted, and with her boom carried away.

"Been in collision," said Tattersall.

They read of it in the papers the following day. The bark *Diamond*, from the west coast, had been in collision outside the heads—her skipper at fault: standing on when he should have kept clear. Tattersall grunted his disdain.

"Pretty hard to tell, Shoofly," said Dowser. "These lubberly papers have probably got it all mixed."

"Some young fool who ought never to have been given a mate's ticket," growled Tattersall.

On the next day the papers stated that the skipper of the *Diamond* had disappeared. It was supposed that, rather than face the disgrace of an inquiry, he had left his ship and gone to sea with an outbound vessel under an assumed name. Men along the water-front laughed. Some shook their heads. Dowser was one of these.

"You never can tell, Shoofly," he said.

Tattersall grunted his disdain for one who had failed in the stern law of the sea.

A few days later, while they were in the city together, Dowser, picking up a paper and idly looking down the advertisement columns, cried—

"Let's go look at her, Shoofly."

Tattersall raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Look at what?" he asked.

Dowser, placing his finger upon the paper, passed it to him, and, shrugging his shoulders, Tattersall read—

"For Sale—Bark *Diamond*"

Together they went to the dock where she was discharging, and found a small clipper-built bark shining from truck to keelson. Her sides were deep green with white painted ports, a light pink below the water-line; her masts and spars white, with both trucks and yard-arms gilded; her skylights, chart-house, fife and topgallant rails of Java teak and finely polished. She glistened with immaculate brass work—bridge rails, ports and binnacles. Her decks, scoured and oiled, were spotless from forecastle head to poop and quarter round. Her rails and deck houses were a light cream; and her standing rigging, tarred and varnished, flashed back the sunrays.

While Tattersall stood upon the bridge, taking in her every detail, Dowser sat upon the cabin skylight watching Nance play about the poop, doll Moses with her.

"What think of her, Shoofly?" he asked as they went ashore.

Tattersall, nodding his head approvingly, said again—

"Some young fool who ought never to have been given a ticket."

The following afternoon Dowser entered Tattersall's room in the small up-town hotel where he stayed; finding him in his shirt sleeves, trimming his beard. Sitting at the window, overlooking the bay, Dowser watched him in silence for a few moments. Suddenly he spoke.

"Shoofly, I've bought her," he said.

"You've what?" said Tattersall, starting.

"Bought the *Diamond*," replied Dowser, meeting his eye.

Tattersall went on with his trimming.

"We'll fit her out, Shoofly—dress her all up, eh? Make her look like a real little lady and send her to sea. When can you go aboard?"

Tattersall pressed a button, and, the boy coming, said:

"Send an express man here right away. Get my bill—look alive."

Dowser arose to leave the room; and, closing the door, turned.

"We'll change her name, Shoofly," he said. "We'll call her the *Fancy Nan*."

Tattersall, rising from the basin where he was washing his lean face, grunted—

"Unlucky to change a ship's name."

Dowser laughed and shut the door.

IV

THE bark *Diamond* was discharged, and went to drydock to be overhauled, cleaned and tallowed. Her sides were painted and she was towed to her berth to prepare for sea.

Dowser was worried. Now that his old ship was gone he was through with the sea, but Nance he knew was eager to sail again.

He talked with Tattersall about it, asking advice. Tattersall shrugged his shoulders.

"Better talk to Moses," he said.

Dowser did so, and the old cook looked him square in the eye.

"If there's anything that will keep her happy ashore, for ——'s sake, doctor, what is it?"

"Buy a farm," said Moses. Dowser raised his brows in blank surprize.

"A farm! What in thunder would I do with a farm?"

" 'Tain't what you'd do with a farm, sir—it's what she'd do with it. There's cows on a farm, an' wobble-tailed calves, an' chickens an' ducks, an' all such like. You try it, sir."

Dowser decided to try it.

The clipper *Fancy Nan* was beginning to take cargo for Europe on the day when, leaving Nance with Moses, he took train for the country.

In twenty-four hours he was owner of the River Bottom farm; an old place gone to seed; dilapidated buildings and fields run wild; no stock and no sign of life save for stray pigeons that had taken up their abode in the deserted barns. Below the buildings, at the foot of the bluffs, flowed the river, bank high and swirling amongst the cottonwoods and willows; the house standing upon a bluff overlooking the stream a couple of hundred yards from the buildings.

He reached home to find his daughter asleep and Moses sitting up awaiting his return. As he entered the kitchen Moses looked up inquiringly. Dowser sat down.

"I've taken your advice," he said. "You're a hayseed from now on."

The following day he made an early trip to the bark to see Tattersall, leaving Nance with Moses.

"I'm going to rig the old ruin up, Shoofly. We'll show these hayseed people how a farm should look, eh?" he said, when he had told Tattersall of his purchase.

Tattersall grunted.

There was a limejuice clipper in the stream, cleared for Europe.

"I want another suit of sails," he said. "She's got two suits below and an old suit aloft. I want another suit of new canvas."

"Order anything you need, Shoofly. Fit her out right. Overhaul her and do as you please. That limejuicer bound your way?"

Tattersall nodded his head.

Dowser went ashore.

"See you when you get back," he said; and saw no more of the *Fancy Nan*. She sailed on the heels of the limejuicer, and he, accompanied by Nance and Moses, took train for the farm.

THE River Bottom farm had but few neighbors. The country thereabout was devoted almost exclusively to grain growing. Such neighbors as dropped over found an uncommunicative man, quite willing, however, to listen to all they had to say about farming. The women, met at the house by a cadaverous party who, remarking—"Skipper's on deck," closed the door upon them, ceased calling after one attempt.

A mile down the road was a little school, which Nance attended. Beyond the school was the Upland farm, owned by De Witt, a close-fisted old fellow who had struggled upward from being a day laborer, and was hard at work clearing off the last of his debts. He was as uncommunicative as Dowser and, once acquainted, the two became good friends.

Once, during the rush of work on the Bottom farm, when Dowser was short of help, De Witt arrived with his team, helping till the rush was over and refusing any pay for his services.

"Reckon you'd do the same by me," he said.

De Witt laughed at Dowser's "new-fangled" notions, ridiculing his cow tester.

"Them there professors has got you fooled, neighbor, with their highfalutin idees," he said.

"Don't doubt it, De Witt. You're the sort would still be hoisting double tops'ls and setting up lanyard rigging—no question of that."

"I ain't bin to none o' them places you speaks of; but I do reckon to hev run a string o' cows."

"How d' you reckon I get the prices for my calves I do?" Dowser, who had stocked his farm with registered cattle, would ask.

"Neighbor, you got 'em all fooled with your highfalutin idees—that's what there is to that; just like you falls fer them professors yourself."

Thus they argued, remaining excellent friends.

Mrs. De Witt, a woman with one son, ever longing for a daughter, came over to see Nance once or twice. Out of Nance she got but small satisfaction, while Nance appeared indifferent as to whether she came or not. Invited to go to the Upland farm, she returned home disgusted with the dirt, the smells, and the countless swarms of flies about the place.

Dowser had hired a foreman, a quiet man, of past middle age, recommended to him by the people at the creamery in town. He left the management of the farm to him; watching him closely, and constantly making suggestions. When he had been one year on the place the River Bottom farm was totally changed; flowers blossoming about the house, and the long neglected fruit trees behind the house as well as the thirsty cottonwoods at the gate taking on a new lease of life.

Moses had early built a boat, a flat-bottomed affair, in which he and Nance spent many hours on the wide sloughs bordering the river, fishing and rowing. In Summer, after the snow-water had subsided with the passing of the June heat-wave, Nance swam in the deep holes alongside the bank in the shade of the overhanging willows and box elders.

The foreman, putting the calves in her charge, and Moses teaching her to cook and to keep house, she was never idle from the time she arose, soon after dawn, until she had fed the calves after the evening milking.

Immediately after the purchase of the farm the *Fancy Nan* was away for four years on foreign charters. On returning to the coast she went to Portland, with general cargo from Europe, and Dowser, going to see her and her skipper, found her trimmer than ever; glistening fore and aft, and the talk of the water-front. Tattersall already had her chartered for the Cape with grain, and was hastening her discharge.

Upon Dowser's return to the farm Nance was eager for news of the ship. But for her preoccupation with an ailing calf she would have insisted upon accompanying him to Portland. He told her that the *Fancy Nan* was at sea again and would probably be away for some years. Nance, busy with her pets and her schooling, seemed to forget the sea.

Letters came from Tattersall from the Cape. The *Fancy Nan* had made the run in fifty days, beating the Liverpool *Glenesslin* by a full week.

"How was that?" he asked, adding—"she has never lost a rope yarn yet."

Dowser, replying, asked, "What's the matter with changing a ship's name now?" And got word from Melbourne, saying that she was matched against the London clipper *Brilliant* for the run to Falmouth.

Nance wrote to him, telling him to bring the bark to San Francisco.

"I want to make a voyage with her," she said.

Dowser, seeing her letter, wrote another.

"Keep her on foreign charters as long as you can. The girl is forgetting the deep water."

Dowser was mistaken.

Each time the bark made port and news of her came, Nance was eager to know whether she were upon the homeward passage yet. Whenever she was reported from sea, and her position given, Nance figured the date when she might be due in. There came a letter from Tattersall, after he had been three years out from Portland, saying that he was chartering her at a high freight for San Francisco direct.

Six months later a telegram came, and Nance receiving it, took it to her father. The bark had been a long time at sea—meeting the full fury of August gales off the Horn, and Dowser had been wondering what had happened to Tattersall. Now she was sighted outside the heads and was due in directly.

Next day came a telegram from Tattersall himself. It said:

> "Five weeks off Stiff. Six men lost."

Nance was all excitement.

That night she came to her father's room and, sitting on the arm of his chair, looked at the pictures on the wall—a full rigged clipper with her three skysails set and her lee railing awash in the sea; beneath her the *Fancy Nan*, with hands aloft stowing the royals as she came to anchorage.

"Where's she bound for?" asked the girl.

"I'm not sure yet—might be anywhere," replied Dowser.

Nance laughed.

"That'll be fine," she cried. "I'd love to sail for anywhere."

"We'll all go, won't we, pa?" she asked.

"Maybe we will," he said and tried to turn the subject.

THE upshot of it was that when the bark went out through the Golden Gate again she went with Dowser in command; for Tattersall refused to go to sea with him a passenger. Moses was signed on as steward's mate; a position invented solely for him to fill.

When the bark dipped to the swells upon the bar Nance stood upon the bridge, her long hair flying on the wind.

"Give her the skysail, pa," she cried.

"Want to tip her over, girl?" replied Dowser.

Nance laughed, clapping her hands, crying—

"Give her the skysail, pa—let's see what the *Fancy Nan* is made of."

Tattersall, on the bridge, grunted.

"Women's out of place on a ship," he said to himself.

The bark was under royals, her lee rail awash, sprays flying across her deck, forward. The girl laid a hand on Tattersall's arm.

"Mr. Tattersall, we didn't sail the old *Nanette* this way, did we?" she asked.

Tattersall grunted. He did not know the girl could still see the old *Nanette*, the smoke wreaths whirling round her, the sea seething alongside, as they raced her, under three skysails, for the shore of Manga Reeva.

Nance pleaded with him.

"Won't you give her that skysail?" she asked.

Tattersall gazed at the weather to windward, where the breeze whipped white horses across the windy sea meadows. The shore was fading from sight. Coming up astern was an outbound China mail boat, the black smoke belching from her funnels. His eye glinted as he watched her sharp bow plow the furrows. Dowser caught his eye, questioning. Dowser blew his whistle and the second mate ran aft.

"Give her that main skysail," said the owner.

The *Fancy Nan* tossed a spray across her foredeck, dancing to the piping wind. Smoke belched from the funnels of the China mail. Dowser, watching her, grinned. Tattersall stared at her, frowning. Forward the hands said:

"The old man's a cracker on. We're going to make a passage."

They crouched under the rail, watching the steamer, making bets upon the time they'd be to Queenstown. Men told of fast runs of old clippers, muttering about stuns'ls and bull-whangers.

"The *Marching King* made it to Sydney in sixty days," said one.

"Aye—an' old Barford spilled her over on the very next v'yage; an' down she went wi' all hands," said another.

Dowser's whistle sounded along the decks shrilly above the wind's piping.

"Check the weather braces in a trifle—just a trifle, sir," he said.

Tattersall grunted. His eyes glinted. The hands, running to the braces, hauled in, singing out as they did so—

"Yo-o-o-o-oh-oh-oh-ho-ho-ho-ho-haul-away-oh!"

Dowser went to the wheel.

"Watch your course," he said.

The helmsman, an ancient man with wrinkle-hidden eyes, cast a disdainful glance at the steamer astern. The stokers were sweating at her fires. She vibrated fore and aft. She smelt of hot oils and of grease. People leaned over her railing, wishing the sea would swallow them up, their souls sinking at the thought of the voyage to China. From her bridge the skipper scowled at the swift-heeled sailing ship ahead; signaling to his engine room. The steamer shuddered as they drove her through the beam sea, rolling as a village wife homebound from weekly market—full of old ale, thinking the highways all her own.

The *Fancy Nan*, catching a puff in her white wings, lay over, dipping her rail in the green sea, tossing the sprays high about her, the bow wash slapping noisily about her weather bow; the sea creaming to lee; her wake a gay garland of emerald and pearl.

Nance Dowser, standing on the poop, watched the China mail plowing the crumbling furrows. Her hair flew on the wind, the sun flashing red strands in it. The helmsman caught a glimpse of her, as he looked along the deck watching the lift of the bow. He tightened his grip upon the kicking wheel.

"They say she was born at sea," he had heard some one say in the focs'le.

The bark lay on her course as a hound that sees the stag running through the bracken—swerving neither to weather nor lee. Dowser stood beside his daughter. She looked up at him, the lights of the sea shining in her face, and laughing, cried:

"The China mail's falling astern, pa. By night she'll be hull down."

Dowser smiled at her, looking toward the China mail, and aloft and along the decks. Going to the bridge he spoke to his mate.

"Keep her as she is, Shoofly—she'll stand it, eh?"

Tattersall grunted, his eyes glinting. The bark, diving to a long hollow, lifted her forefoot from the farther crest, trampling the sea to a white smother about her.

Cook Moses, coming from the cabin, stared over the water; the wind blowing his long beard. He winced, a twinge of rheumatism racking his bones. He heard the owner's daughter laughing as the bark dipped her bows in the sea and, forgetting his aches, went to the cabin whistling a chantey tune.

Night fell upon the sea. The China mail was a dark speck to the eastward. The sun had gone, leaving a trail of crimson flaming the sky. Over the steamer a star twinkled and was lost again. Far forward, under the focs'le head, a sailor was tuning a fiddle; sailors about him waiting to dance to it. Darkness gathered and the China mail was lost in the night. The *Fancy Nan* danced alone, as a witch amidst the purpling heather. An iron bell clanged above the murmur of the sea and wind and fiddle's music. The watches were set, the wheel and the lookout relieved. A sailor, coming from the wheel, gave the mate the course. The lookout man's voice, reporting from the focs'le head, rang along the decks, slowly, as the dying music of an old sea chorus—

"A-l-l-l-l-l-s well, sir."

V

MAKING the run to Queenstown in a hundred and five days, the bark received her orders outside, and proceeded to the Elbe to discharge, with a stiff sou'wester on her quarter. Nance stood upon the poop as she passed between the rows of ships at anchor in the Downs, awaiting a wind to take them to sea.

There were outbound London clippers for the Cape and Rio Grande and for the colonies; a double-stayed saltpeter-man from Hamburg, and topsail schooners for the coasting trade; rust-ribbed tramps for anywhere, and a long black funnel liner snorting out to sea heedless of weather in her teeth.

They dipped their colors as the *Fancy Nan* slipped past them; Dowser flying the great silk flag that was kept for such occasions in the chart-house locker; the sou'west wind rippling its long folds, and its stars flashing over the morning sea. The passengers aboard the outbound liner crowded to her rail to watch the white-winged clipper speeding past, crying—

"She's from around the Horn—from San Francisco—a Yankee clipper; see her fly?"

"From around the Horn," they repeated, staring at her; picturing icebergs and hurricanes and terrors of undreamed-of seas.

"There's a woman on her deck," cried some one; and women in warm robes hastened to the rail to watch the clipper from around the Horn go by—a sailing clipper with a woman on her deck—the *Fancy Nan*, treading the narrow waters as a girl treads dewy meadows on a flowered morning.

Discharging at Hamburg, she towed across to the Tyne for loading; and on a May morning, when the wild flowers were breaking to bloom under the hedges of England, stole away seaward again—to the meadows that are fenceless and free.

Dowser, watching the light of St. Catherine's fade astern, stood with his mate upon the bridge.

"My last voyage, Shoofly. I'm getting old," he said.

Tattersall stared across the fields of the sea, lighted by the full moon; gleaming with spangles of silver.

"Shoofly, you'd better quit the sea and come and live ashore. Buy a farm and run a string of cows," said Dowser; and his mate, watching the main truck against a star, cried to the helmsman—

"Watch your course."

Nance joined them; standing at her father's side, watching the sea lights shine. He placed his arm about her shoulder.

"It'll be good to be home again, girl, eh?" he said; and she snuggled against him. The wind piped amongst the shrouds, clouds drifting over the moon.

Moses, coming to the quarter-deck, leaned upon the railing, staring across the sea, the wind blowing his white beard. Nance, seeing him there, left the bridge to join him. Laying her head against his arm—

"Moses," she asked, "how old are you now?"

He looked at her face, with the moon shining on it.

"Old enough to know better," he said.

"Oh! Moses," she cried, "how old *are* you?"

He waved an arm, encircling the moonlit sea with the gesture.

"Old enough to know better," said he. "This ain't no place for a woman."

The wind blowing his beard, he winced with the pains of rheumatism.

"See yonder! There's a steamer coming up-channel," he said.

Looking where he pointed, she saw the mast-head lights of a steamer twinkling above the sea, and went to the bridge to watch her pass; aflame with bright lights, her decks crowded with people; coming close to the sailing ship that curious folk might see her.

They crowded her decks to watch the *Fancy Nan* go by; the moonlight on her sails, her gilded trucks and yard-arms shining.

"I wonder where she's going?" asked one.

"Might be anywhere," replied another.

"Might be Sydney, Calcutta, or Hongkong," a deck hand answered. "Might be Frisco, Rio Grande or Grand Canary."

Mr. Tattersall stared at the liner disdainfully, grunting.

"Was you ever in steam?" asked one sailor of another.

"Once—never again," replied the other.

" 'Tain't nothin' but swab an' paint," said a third.

They sat under the lee of the forward deck-house as the steamer faded astern, talking of ships.

"A man what follows the sea is a —— fool," said one.

"Aye, that's wot you are, son," said another. "You an' me both."

"They say the owner's got a farm ashore," said the first speaker.

"Who wouldn't sell a farm an' go to sea?" another questioned.

The iron bell clanged above the pipe of the wind and the wash of the sea. Gathering aft they answered to their names; the voice of the lookout man crying from the focs'le head, slowly, as an old sea chorus dying on the night,

"A-l-l-l-l-l-s well, sir."

HOLDING a leading wind for many days she ran down the trade latitudes, and beating into head winds off the Plate, came at length to misty weather as she neared the Horn.

One morning, while making four or five knots, the weather hazy and the wind unsteady, a hand reported a boat on the lee bow. The skipper and the mate searched the sea with glasses; Nance beside them, filled with excitement.

The haze thickening, Dowser ordered the main yards aback; heaving her to to wait and watch awhile. He sent for the man who had reported the boat.

"Are you sure of it? Sure it was a boat you saw?"

"Aye, 'twas a boat, sir, sure enough."

"Probably the back of a whale, or a blackfish," growled Tattersall.

"Beg pardon, sir, 'twas a boat; white painted, plain as my nose, sir."

The bark lay lifting idly to the swell, her main yard aback and men gathered in groups about the decks peering through the haze. Tattersall tramped impatiently up and down the bridge, anxious to fill the yards and lay her on her course again.

"Fair winds are scarce off the Horn, sir; better be getting along," he said.

"An open boat off the Horn's ——," answered Dowser. "I guess we'd better lay to awhile and watch."

Suddenly he shouted:

"There she is!" adding, "Tattersall, get a boat cleared away at once."

Through the lifting haze they saw, a mile on the bow, a ship's boat; a man standing in her, and waving a rag of canvas lashed to an oar, endeavoring to attract their attention.

The wind was freshening a little.

"Better go off to her, Shoofly. Take three men who can put weight on an oar. Look alive—weather's changing."

Tattersall dropped into the boat.

"Make it lively," he said, as the sailors lay back on their oars. The wind was blowing up.

From the other boat a man was frantically waving. As they drew near they heard him shouting and Tattersall waved a reply.

They came up with a steamer's boat, the name *Tekoa* painted on her bow, and, pulling alongside, found four men in her; two of them lying prone in her bottom, huddled under a sail; one sitting on a thwart, listlessly, paying no heed to them. The man who had waved seized his shoulders, shaking him, crying:

"Wake up, wake up, it's all well. We're picked up."

Rising, staring at the boat from the *Fancy Nan*, curiously, as if half awaking from a dream, he clambered toward her.

"——!" he muttered, "ain't it ——?" His hands were frozen and he stumbled upon frozen feet.

They helped him aboard, and two men from the bark's boat, boarding the derelict, raised the men from her bottom; lifting them with difficulty, for, wind and sea rising, the boats rose with quick rolls on the chop. Looking about his boat for a moment the man who had waved, shaking his head, said—

"Got to quit her, I guess," and, climbing over the gunwale, fell and lay as if exhausted in the bottom at Tattersall's feet.

"Give way men, make it lively," cried Tattersall, heading for the bark.

The wind was rising fast, a cap whipping over the crests, and beyond the bark the sea was hidden in a scudding mist.

"Give way, make it lively—use your weight," cried Tattersall, as, drifting over the water, the mist half hid her, her sails looming faint and phantom-like through its wet folds. Suddenly she was gone, lost in the fog; and they were alone upon the cold Horn sea.

From over the water they heard, faintly, above the lap of the sea, voices crying. Tattersall, leaning forward, peering into the mist, cried constantly—

"Lively, make it lively."

Climbing to a thwart the man who had waved from the steamer's boat grasped an oar, pushing it out, every movement racking him. The voices were growing closer, and Tattersall, a hand to his lips, answered. The shape of the lost bark loomed suddenly above them, and in another moment they were under her side.

The rescued men were tended in the cabin of the *Fancy Nan;* the skipper's daughter bringing them food and steaming coffee. The young man, who had waved from the boat, told their story.

"*Tekoa*, sir. Greenock to Puget sound. She struck in thick weather off Magellan somewhere, about a week ago. I was sent with the boat to try to see the damage, when she backed off. Dense fog set in and we lost her. I was second mate, sir."

Recovering slowly from their exposure, room was made for the three men forward; while a bunk was fitted up for the second mate in the room occupied by Moses.

His name was John Lowrie, a Britisher from Cornwall; a quiet sort of man with deep-brown eyes and reddish hair, a clean-shaven face, and regular white teeth that showed when he smiled. He was a man of medium height, but of unusual width, even for a sailor. They took a liking to him—a reticent man who had nothing to say about himself.

Dowser questioned him, asking him about the limejuice ships. He held an extra master's ticket—something that neither Dowser nor Tattersall had ever seen. He had held a command in sail, going to sea at sixteen and being third at nineteen and mate at twenty-one. He had been master of the *Linlithgow*—one of the fast Scotch county clippers, a four-masted bark. Now in steam, he was starting after the manner of the service, from the bottom once more.

"A bit too big, sir. I like a handier ship, but a man at sea can't choose," he said of the *Linlithgow*.

"What do you think of this little packet?" asked Dowser.

Lowrie smiled, showing his white teeth.

"She's my style of a ship, sir; handy and a fine sea boat. Where did you get her queer name?"

Dowser told him of the burning of the old *Nanette*, and of how Reuben Sweeney had carried Nance off her.

"When I bought this bark I changed her name from *Diamond* to *Fancy Nan*," he said.

Lowrie frowned, starting; and shaking his head said:

"Unlucky, sir—unlucky to change a ship's name. She'll bring you trouble if you don't look out."

Dowser, laughing, called to Nance.

"Mr. Lowrie says the ship is going to bring us trouble—what do you think of that, Nance?" he asked.

Looking up at them from the quarter-deck, the star-shine in her wide eyes, she smiled.

"I'm not scared," she said. "I'll go anywhere she takes me, and take what she brings."

"I hope you get a heap of luck, Miss Dowser; but the sea's a hard place," said Lowrie.

"Oh!" she cried, "you are as bad as Moses—too bad you have to room with him. I bet it's he who's getting such things to your mind."

Lowrie laughed.

"No, Miss Dowser, it isn't Moses. I've seen it before. I saw the old *Narwhale* go to sea after they changed her from the *Isabella*. You know what came of her."

"I've never heard of her. What did, Mr. Lowrie?" asked the girl.

"Mutiny and bloody murder, miss—abandoned at sea and set afire. They picked up the skipper's daughter in an open boat, crazy as a flitter-bat. Every one else was lost."

Nance gave a little scream.

"Good heavens, you are cheerful. Is that the sort of yarn they spin in the dog-watch on a limejuice ship?"

Lowrie, looking down at her upturned face, answered her.

"I hope you get a heap of luck, Miss Dowser. I owe my life to you and to your ship. I'm not likely to forget that."

Turning to Dowser he said—

"By the way, this chap Moses, is he a Buddhist, or what?"

"I never heard him mention any brand of religion," replied Dowser. "Why do you ask?"

"He's got a battered old thing that I supposed must be a heathen idol of some variety stuck against the bulkhead in the room. I asked him who it was the other evening when I found him sitting staring at it; and turning to me, with a funny look on his face, he said:

"'She'll fetch the ship luck. Never you fear.'"

"I guess that must be what's left of doll Moses," laughed Dowser.

"What do you mean? Doll Moses? I don't get you, sir?"

"Doll Moses and cook Moses used to share Nance about equally at one time. Doll was given to her by cook when she was a little thing. Nance outgrew doll quite a while ago; and I suppose that Moses must have taken up with her. Moses was cook of the old *Nanette;* and but for him Nance would have died when she lost her mother." Dowser's voice had fallen and his head was bowed.

"Nance has always been heaven and earth to the old cook," he added.

ENTERING the Golden Gate, the *Fancy Nan* came to anchor one hundred and twelve days out from Tyneside.

"My last voyage, and a fine one," said Dowser, as, standing on the poop with Tattersall and Nance and Lowrie, he watched the mists rise above the ferry building, and the sunlight glimmer through upon the waters of the bay.

"I'll be content upon the farm from now on," he added.

"Got a taste for farming, have you, sir?" asked Lowrie.

"Got more than that. We've got a farm. Haven't we, Nance?"

"We certainly have," said Nance. "Mr. Lowrie, you'd better come and look it over. Maybe we'll give you a job milking, or pitching hay. How'd you like that?"

"I'm coming to look it over one of these days, sure enough, Miss Dowser. Just now I've got to find out what came of the old *Tekoa*. If she's afloat she's got a lot of my things aboard her. There's a trifle of a pay-day owing me too. But don't you forget, Miss Dowser, some of these days you'll see me stroll up the road to your farm."

Boats were coming off to the ship; the health officer, boarding masters, photographers, tailors, and the many who made a living from the ships and their money-free sailors.

Tattersall and Dowser left the poop, leaving Nance and Lowrie together. The deck became a scene of bustle as the people from shore mingled with the sailors. A tug was coming off to the bark; for an outbound cargo already awaited her, and she was to go at once to her discharging berth. Tattersall ordered the hands to the windlass to heave the anchor in again, and they went, singing and shouting. The shore-folks, ordered off the ship, left her reluctantly. The wind had died away and the water was unruffled. The song of the men, stamping around the windlass, echoed over the bay.

"Are you leaving the sea for good too, Miss Dowser?" asked Lowrie, as they listened to the song.

"Oh! I don't think so. No. I'll always want to go back for one more voyage, I think," she answered.

"There's something about it that gets into one's blood and stays there," said Lowrie, adding, "but it's no place for a woman, after all."

They were silent, listening to the chantey chorus:

> "A-rovin', a-rovin', oh, rovin's been my ruin.
> I'll go no more a-rovin' with you, fair maid."

"Miss Dowser," said Lowrie, "I'd like to make another voyage with you. I don't feel that rovin' has been my ruin at all. Not yet."

Nance blushed, and Lowrie added:

"I'll tell you just one thing—I don't like the idea of this ship's having had her name changed. It's not lucky."

Nance laughed.

"I think you are funny. I'll go wherever she takes me; and take what she brings," she said.

The bark was moving toward the wharf and, coming from the chart-house, Dowser handed Lowrie a paper. He took it eagerly, turning to the shipping-news.

"Listen," he cried—

> "S. S. *Tekoa* leaves Vancouver for San Francisco, to finish loading for Antwerp, on Tuesday next."

"That's an old paper, Mr. Lowrie. Your ship's about due in now, isn't she?" asked Nance, looking at the date on the paper.

A whistle sounding across the water, they turned to look. A huge and rusty tramp, with one black funnel, was slowing down as she came to anchor between the ferries and Goat Island.

"Sailor's luck," cried Lowrie. "There's the old tub herself."

"I believe I'd sooner take my luck going to sea with the *Fancy Nan*, even though her name has been changed, than go to sea with such an ugly old coal-box as that," said Nance.

Lowrie looked at her, smiling.

"I believe I would too, Miss Dowser," he said.

Nance Dowser blushed, and Lowrie, turning to the owner, said:

"I guess I'll be saying so-long, sir. I'll be getting aboard that dainty coal-basket. No end of thanks, sir, for picking us up."

They shook hands, and Lowrie raised his hat to Nance. Holding her hand out to him, she said—

"Don't forget we'll be looking for you on the farm."

"I'll not forget," he answered her, and went from the bridge of the *Fancy Nan* on his way to the *Tekoa*.

VI

DOWSER, turning the bark and all her business over to Tattersall, caught a train; and he and Nance were on the River Bottom farm before the sun went down. Everything was as they had left it. There were a few more calves and a number of huge haystacks. Nelson, the foreman, greeted them with pleasure in his face, knowing that none could have done better than he, and glad to turn the responsibility over to Dowser. Moses was with them and, becoming immediately busy in the kitchen, they sat down to a "shore-going" supper, as Nance called it.

Dowser asked for the news. News of interest to Nelson he had none, and the talking was all on Nelson's side. Talking slowly and with great deliberation he told them how the country had changed immensely since they had gone away, and that, new settlers having come in in great numbers, where there had been but one neighbor before there were now half a dozen. The country had been subdivided and cut up into small farms of ten, twenty and forty acres. The town had grown; boasting two new creameries and a milk factory. Real estate was booming, and real estate men calling frequently at the farm to inquire if it were for sale.

Next morning, at sunrise, Nance hoisted the numbers of the *Fancy Nan* to the peak of the tall flagstaff before the house, the morning breeze fluttering the bright flags, and their gay colors shining in the sun.

From their farmyards and doorways the neighbors, seeing the flags, wondered what was going on at the River Bottom farm. The place had always been a mystery to them; for the old Swede foreman would never satisfy their curiosity by telling them his owner's business.

That afternoon one or two of the most inquisitive went over and, finding a bald-headed man wandering amongst the stock, with a young girl beside him, became more than ever curious; finding it impossible to draw either into any conversation other than remarks upon the weather—the farmer's invariable theme—a subject completely ignored by sailors ashore.

Going away puzzled, they sent their women, who needed no sending. The women, meeting at the door an old man, with a long white beard, who, muttering, "skipper's on deck," shut the door upon them, were scandalized. Seeing a young woman strolling among the flowers, they addressed themselves to her; to be met with polite replies that gave them no satisfaction.

Their curiosity whetted, they went home as perplexed as their men had been before them.

"C'ain't be his wife; she's too young," said one.

"Ef it's his wife, then it's a scandal an' a shame; she's that young," said another.

"Ain't she the homeliest thing?" queried an angular woman with a red mole on the starboard side of her nose.

"Ef it's his daughter 'tain't not right fer no young woman ter live alone with a lot of old men," said another.

The grown folk having met with no success, it devolved upon the young people to solve the mystery of the Bottom farm; and they dropped over, in twos and threes and singly.

Meeting Dowser, the boys would raise their hats.

"Want something, boy?" he would ask.

"No, sir—I just dropped over."

Dowser, reared in the hard rearing of the sea, with little use for young men with idle time on their hands, would reply—

"Maybe you'd better be dropping back, eh?"

Girls, meeting him, found a different greeting.

"Hello, sis, looking for some one?"

"Why, I just heard there was a lady over here, sir. I thought maybe she was lonesome."

"Well, it's kind of you to come over. My girl isn't much given to the lonesome idea, I guess. You'll find her somewhere about the place."

Meeting Nance, they found a girl who was quite disinterested in hats or dresses; who appeared to know as much, if not more, of housekeeping than did their own mothers; and appeared to be perfectly able to amuse herself with no assistance.

Little by little the curiosity of the neighborhood died away; the immediate neighbors becoming to some extent gradually acquainted with Dowser.

The young men of the countryside were deeply interested in Nance. Her father being a sea captain meant something which they were unable to put into words; giving her a halo of romance quite apart from any fascination about herself.

Every one in the district realized that Dowser was "well fixed" and naturally every parent was anxious that his son should win Nance Dowser. Most of the farmers were struggling against debt—which was evidently not a bugbear on the River Bottom farm. Old Nelson paid good wages, seeing that he got good help in return, of course; and himself working indefatigably, month in and month out, in the fields beside the men.

"Nelson, you ought to have been a sailor," said Dowser one day, when the old man was getting in the third cutting of alfalfa and the thermometer stood at a hundred and ten in the shade.

"You were cut out for bosun of a three-skys'l clipper," he added.

"Maybe so, Mr. Dowser. Maybe you iss right," answered Nelson. "I had two brothers once and both of them was drowned at sea. My father, he was drowned at sea. I was to go to sea too, but my old mother, she begged it out of me. 'Peter,' she says, 'let's go to America an' forget the cold sea.' That's how I come to America, sir. We were from up by Bergen way. When the old lady died, then I was grown too old to go to sea. It's fine to travel around and to see things, Mr. Dowser. But my old mother, she cried me away from the sea."

Nelson and Moses were cronies. Nelson, beside Moses, was young. There was the same air of quiet confidence about them both.

They lived together in the back of the house, sharing a room, as the steward and the bo's'n used to do on the clippers.

Old De Witt was still on the Upland farm, working as tirelessly as ever, refusing to sell his land, but preferring to dig out of debt by unceasing toil. It was not till Dowser had been home a week that he arrived at the Bottom farm. There had been a rush of work in his hay-fields, and neither he nor his wife had had a spare moment. Now he came over, bringing his son; a tall hard-working lad eager to see all there was to be seen.

As they walked homeward after visiting Dowser, and seeing his stock and their clean corrals, and spotless white-painted barns, the boy talked enthusiastically of the place.

Old De Witt grunted.

"Reckon you think your old paw don't know nuthin' nohow," he said.

"Oh! you're all right, paw—but I reckon you ain't jest up ter date," answered the boy.

Clyde De Witt became a frequent visitor at the River Bottom farm; often helping in the hay-fields, or running the turbine separator for old Nelson. He liked the place, sweet-scented and clean; the house smelling of flowers and of the hay-fields beyond it—where at home everything was subdued to the smells from the corrals and the pig-pens.

Old mother De Witt scolded her son for his constant attendance at the Bottom farm.

"Looks like you ain't got no sense at all, Clyde. There's a right smart lot o' nice girls without you a-goin' moonin' arter that there Nance Dowser."

"Mebbe so, maw," he would answer her. "But I'll tell you Captain Dowser's a right smart man, an' Nance takes arter him. She's bin around some, too, Nance has."

"She ain't not near as smart as wot Ora Kelly be; an' she ain't got nothin' like her looks."

"Ory Kelly? Why, maw—Ory Kelly don't know nuthin' outside o' six miles o' the Kelly place. She's pretty all right; but ef she don't quit a-puttin' herself in my way I'm a-goin' ter call her down. She makes me fair sick."

VII

ONE day Clyde De Witt went over to the River Bottom farm, searching for Dowser; and found him seated under the trees in front of the house reading the paper. Nance was away in the Bottoms. Dowser nodded to him.

"Want something?"

"Yes, Mr. Dowser. I sure do," replied the boy.

"What's on your mind?" asked Dowser, laying down his paper and looking inquiringly at the boy.

"A lot of things, sir. Maybe you kin help me out. It's thisaway, sir. I cain't help it; ain't no feller could. I wants your gal, sir, Nance; but I know there ain't no show fer me. I ain't in her class. She's bin around an' I ain't. You've got no use fer me I don't reckon, an' I'd like fer you to hev. You folks is up to the notch, an' my paw an' maw ain't an' never will be. They're sot in their ways, sir. I want to know, Mr. Dowser, wot I kin do so's you-all 'll hev a better opinion of me. Then mebbe some day I'll be able ter tell your gal the way I feels."

Dowser looked hard at the boy.

"How old are you, boy?" he asked.

"Nineteen, sir."

"You've got lots of time ahead. Plow your own furrow and see what comes of it. Your pa grew up doing his own digging, and so did I. I like a man to shift for himself. I've got nothing to advise you. Pull your own oar—if there's man in you it'll come out."

For a minute young De Witt stood looking at Dowser, then said:

"Thank you, sir. I reckon I'll not bother you for a while." Then he turned away.

A few days after young De Witt's visit Nance sat sewing beneath the trees in front of the house. It was the Fall of the year and the still air was fragrant with the scent of the fields, where the last cutting of hay stood in the shock. The only sound that reached her was the occasional rattle of a buck-rake wheel, or the far-off voice of a man who spoke to his team. Suddenly, hearing a footstep near by, she started, and looking up, saw a man coming through the gate between the two tall cottonwoods. Rising, she held out her hand.

"Mr. Lowrie, it's fine to see you," she cried.

"Thank you, Miss Dowser. I've come to look at the farm, as you told me to."

Nance called her father. He was down at the stackyard, and she ran in to get her hat. They walked to the yard together.

"Tell me where you've been, Mr. Lowrie, please. Quick, I want to hear," she cried.

"Oh," he laughed, "that's a big order all of a sudden. Let's see. I went back to Liverpool with the old *Tekoa*, didn't I? Yes. Well, I left her and took a trip with a Rennie boat to Natal and Delagoa, Chinde and those little fever-holes up the East African coast, you know. Then went to Mobile with a Drum Line tramp. Then was lucky—skipper of the *Roxburgh* for a voyage. I was with the county ships before, you know; before you picked me out of the water that time off Stiff. I took her to the colonies and made a fast run too. By the way, where's the *Fancy Nan?*"

"Somewhere between the Cape and the Horn, I guess," answered Nance. "She's bound for the Cape and I suppose will be coming home with coal, from Newcastle. Isn't it a shame to load a clipper with such a horrid cargo?"

They were at the stackyard gate, standing aside to let a buck-rake pass. As they stood there Dowser came around a stack and held out his hand to Lowrie.

"Where did you blow in from?" he asked.

"I left my ship in Frisco, sir. Doctor's orders. Got a screw loose somewhere. The doc said it was probably started that time we spent a week in the *Tekoa's* boat off the Horn—too much exposure. I had a couple of them overhaul me from truck to keelson. They told me to stick ashore for a while in a warm climate. I thought I'd come and look your farm over on the way, sir."

Lowrie stayed a while on the farm; learning to drive a team and to milk a cow; rowing about in the bottoms with Nance while she fished, and listened to his tales of the sea.

One day, when old De Witt was short of help, he accompanied Nelson to the Upland farm, where Clyde at once became deeply interested in him. The old man took a liking to him.

"Never seed a feller pitch so much hay in a day; an' I've seed a many," he said.

To young De Witt, asking questions of the world outside, he spoke of Singapore and Rio Grande, Taltal and Teneriffe—places of which Clyde had never heard.

Nance, delighted to see him again, plied him with questions of the sea and the ports.

"I haven't seen the sea for three years," she said.

Lowrie smiled at her, saying:

"It'll always be there, Miss Dowser; and always the same."

"Oh!" she would say, "I want to go to sea again." And Lowrie would reply—

"The sea's no place for a woman—not really."

She laughed at him.

"You and Moses ought to be brothers," she said.

Moses, bent with age, his beard quite white, seventy and looking eighty, but still active and imperious, and rarely troubled now with rheumatism, scowled when he saw Lowrie arrive.

Nelson liked him.

"I was to have been a sailor, too," he would say, as they walked together from the barns, "I had two brothers once, and both of them was drowned at sea. My father, he was drowned at sea. I was to go to sea too; but my old mother, she cried it out of me. 'Let's go to America, Peter,' she says, 'an' forget the cold sea.' That's how I come to America, sir. It's fine to travel and see things: but my old mother, she cried me away from the sea."

One day Lowrie knocked at the door of Dowser's room, and Dowser, sitting looking at the pictures of the old *Nanette*, and of the *Fancy Nan*, of Nance and of her mother, called to him to come in.

"What's on your mind?" he asked.

Lowrie gazed at the old *Nanette* with her three skysails set and the sea lapping over her railing.

"Mr. Dowser," he said, "there's much on my mind, sir. I owe you my life. I don't forget that. You need not have hove your ship to, that morning off the Horn."

He was silent for a minute, Dowser staring at him.

"Captain Dowser," he said, rising to his feet, as if they were aboard, and he addressing his commander, "I want your girl, sir. I came to ask your permission. That's not been my way—asking permission. But I ask it now. I am in your debt, sir."

"Sit down," said Dowser.

For a few moments neither spoke. Then, turning to Lowrie, Dowser said—

"The sea is no place for a woman."

"I can get a good command, sir. A steam command with good money in it, and chances to make side money as well. My wife can live ashore, sir."

"Said anything to my girl?" asked Dowser.

"No, sir—nothing. I wanted to play square with you."

They were silent again for a while. Then Lowrie spoke—

"I would rather quit the sea, sir, than give up Nance."

"Nance has got sea-fever. She'd turn you down like a shot if you quit the sea I imagine—maybe you'd better quit. I don't know what to say," said Dowser. Turning about, he stared hard at Lowrie.

"Are you sure of yourself?"

"I could have said all I have said now years ago, sir. But I have waited. I don't think you need question that I am sure."

"Nance is young—very young. If you can wait, so can she wait. You'd better wait a while I think."

"Captain Dowser, may I speak to her, sir? I'd like to know her answer."

Dowser arose and paced the little room. Stopping in front of the picture of the woman on the wall, he said:

"We waited—waited for years; and the sea took toll at the end of it. Nance is very young. I'd rather you waited a while, Lowrie. I don't want any mistakes made—she's all I've got.

"This craze she has for the sea will pass as she grows older," he continued, "and she'll settle down. Take her now and there'll be no keeping her ashore. She'll be like her mother was—wanting to follow the long cold furrows of the fenceless meadows; witched by the stars and the moon on the water and the roar of the gales. Lowrie, I hate the sea. It has robbed me—robbed me of my life. Wait a while and let my girl settle down."

He gazed at the face of Nance's mother; and Lowrie, seeing the tenseness of his face, thrust out a hand.

"Captain Dowser, you didn't have to back your yards that morning off the Horn, sir. I guess I can pay my debt."

Dowser took the proffered hand.

"Thank you," he said and added—

"There's no other man I would ask for her."

The following day Lowrie bade the River Bottom farm good-by.

"I'm going down to a little place called the Ojai Valley," he said. "It's a God-forgotten hole, they tell me; dry as bone-dust, and hidden in the hills. A few months there and I'll be able to go to sea again. They say it'll cook all the wheezes out of a man for good."

Nance bade him good-by, under the cottonwoods beside the gate, her large eyes fixed upon his face.

"I hope it will cure you," she said.

He took her proffered hand a moment, fighting himself, saying—

"So-long, Miss Dowser, some day I'll be back."

Clyde De Witt drove him to the depot. As they stood awaiting the arrival of the train Clyde asked him—

"D'you reckon a guy like me could get a job on a ship?"

Lowrie laughed.

"Any one can get a job on a ship," he said. "It's a hard old life though, sonny, and if you take my advice you'll stay on the farm."

The train came and they parted company, De Witt going back to the farm with Lowrie's words in his ears.

"Any one can get a job on a ship." He forgot the rest of them.

A few days later, when his father called him for the morning milking, he was gone; leaving the old folks hopelessly perplexed. Two days after his departure there came a letter from him:

Ship *Kenilworth.*
San Francisco.
dere folks i'm goin to take a trip to see i reckon its good to go abowt an see things sum. Wen i get to the forrin contrys will wrte you all abowt it. you dont need to fus i will be o k
yr son Clyde
ps how is that ther sik carf a comin now?

De Witt was furious, and his old wife cried with sorrow and with anger mixed.

"It's that ther good-fer-nothin' gal o' that old fool Dowser's wot's ben an' done this," she shouted. "I'm a-goin' right over an' tell him wot I thinks of his likes."

"You kip quiet," said De Witt. "I'm a-goin' over an' see Dowser. 'Tain't no good to raise a holler afore you know wot's done it. Jest you kip your trap shet an' don't holler so."

De Witt went over, taking his boy's letter; and thrust it into Dowser's hand, saying—

"Read that——."

Dowser read it.

Looking inquiringly at the old farmer, he asked—

"What seems to be the trouble, neighbor?"

De Witt, half-rising in his seat, cried:

"Trouble? Trouble? You'd orter know what the trouble is! That fool gal o' yours done it. That's what's the trouble."

"De Witt," said the other, "don't let's make any mistakes. We might regret them."

They sat opposite each other, their eyes meeting, and presently old De Witt spoke:

"Neighbor, my boy's all I've got. Your gal's the same by you I reckon. I ain't a-wantin' to be hasty, an' I apologizes ef I bin talkin' rough-like. But what's done got this here thing to Clyde's head?"

"Did he ever say anything to you about Nance?" asked Dowser.

"Never a word. I've a-hearn his mother a-rowin' at him, she thinkin' he was crazed-like fer your gal. He ain't never said one word to me."

For a few minutes Dowser sat silent; and then, walking up and down, told the old farmer of his son's visit to him.

"De Witt, I told him this. I said: 'You go plow your own furrow and see what comes of it. I like a man to shift for himself. Your pa did his own digging, and I did mine. I've got no advice for you. Pull your own oar—if there's man in you it'll come out.' De Witt, did I tell your boy wrong?"

"By ——, no! You done fine, neighbor. You got the gift o' the words which is wot I lacks. Wot's made him get this notion to his head though? Do you reckon he ain't got it from your gal?"

"He told me he hadn't spoken to my girl, and wouldn't," replied Dowser.

"Then by ——, he ain't! My boy ain't no liar. I'll answer fer that."

"I believe you. I like him, De Witt. He's a man—just needs a little rub."

The old farmer held out his hand and Dowser took it.

"It'll come out all right," he said.

"What's this he's gone an' tackled, neighbor? D'you reckon as how it'll come out fer good? I don't know nothin', an' the old woman's jest plumb crazy with the whole idee."

Dowser assured him that all would be well.

"The sea's a bit rough for youngsters sometimes," he said, "but you don't need to worry. He'll come back a husky."

The Winter passed with no news of either Lowrie or of Clyde De Witt. The *Fancy Nan* was still at sea on foreign charters, and not likely to be home for many months.

IT WAS mid-April, and the hay was ripening toward the first cutting, when John Lowrie again came through the gate between the cottonwoods. There was no one at the house, and he sat upon the door-step looking through the trees, over the shimmering hay-fields toward the fences of the River Bottom farm. Nance, coming from the bottoms, found him there, and crying, "Good day, stranger; where are you from?" held out her hand.

"How is every one?" he asked. "You are looking shipshape as ever—fit for any weather. How's the captain? And Moses? And Nelson?"

"Every one is 'all sir-garney-oh,' Mr. Lowrie. What of your loose screw?"

"If that hole in the hills hasn't tightened my loose screw, there's no use trying to tighten it. I've been fried, baked and roasted since I saw you. I've lived like a squirrel in a cage—me for the fenceless meadows!"

Nance's eyes flashed; her cheeks flushing, and the Spring sun warm in the strands of her hair. Tossing her head, she sniffed at the wind.

"Do you know, Mr. Lowrie," she cried,

"I sometimes think, when the wind is northerly, that I can smell the open water? I want to go to sea again, too. You are not the only one who feels cramped ashore. Wait till the *Fancy Nan* comes home—then dad's going to let me take a trip to sea."

"I'll be getting along then, myself," he laughed, "so that you can back that main-yard again, and give me another lift, when we meet on the windy meadows."

Dowser was coming up the road, and they went to meet him. He shook hands, asking after the loose screw. Lowrie, asking after the De Witts, and hearing that young De Witt had gone to sea, opened his eyes.

"Lowrie, you pretty nearly got me in bad with those old people. I believe it was all your doing. They put it at my door," said Dowser.

"Well, sir, that would have been a pity, to have made bad blood between neighbors. He did ask me about getting a job on a ship, I remember, and I advised him to stay on the farm. What's the news of him?"

"None. He went with the *Kenilworth.* You know her? A Maine bark. Old Murphy, who used to have the *Shenandoah,* has her; and if he handles her as he handled the *Shenandoah*—well; farmer boy's coming home with a salt-pickled skin."

Lowrie asked for shipping news.

"Haven't seen a shipping paper or a ship since I saw you last, sir."

"There are a lot of your limejuice ships laying up about the bay, it seems. Freights haven't been any too good lately. They are starting to pick up again now, I think. I noticed the other day that a Liverpool full-rigger, the *Aldebaran,* was wanting a mate," said Dowser.

"The *Aldebaran,* eh? Not for me, sir! I've sailed once in those John Lupin Company ships when I was an apprentice on the old *Silversea.* Talk about starvation! Why, they are known as the hungriest ships out of Liverpool! And that is out of anywhere, you know."

Together they walked to the house, talking of ships and of the changing days at sea; with steamers taking all the trade, and the clippers fast going.

"I want just one more voyage in sail before I quit for steam," said Lowrie, and added, "Miss Dowser, you'll be interested to hear that I've taken out my papers—my first ones—after a while I'm going to be a hard-case Yankee."

Nance flushed with pleasure.

"Mr. Lowrie, that's fine. Why don't you look for an American ship right away?"

"Maybe I'll do that," he answered.

He stayed at the farm for a few days, going over to see the old De Witts, and telling them of the conversation at the depot with Clyde. They were glad to see him, and forgave him readily for any influence he might have had in sending their son to sea.

The alfalfa-checks were covered with irrigation water, and a cool breeze blew off the fields on the day when he left for San Francisco. From the gate between the cottonwoods Nance waved good-by to him.

"I shall be looking for the *Fancy Nan,*" he had said to her. "Maybe you'll be giving me another lift one of these days."

The evening before he went he told her father:

"I shall be coming back, sir, after awhile. You know what for."

Dowser nodded his head.

Three days after he left them a letter came for Dowser from him. He had signed on with the *May Flint,* a large Salem ship, bound for Europe.

"Not my kind of a ship," he wrote. "She's too big and unhandy for me; but I guess I can stick her for one voyage."

They read of the sailing of the *May Flint,* and heard no more of him.

A week or so after his departure old De Witt came hurrying over one afternoon, his face wet with sweat, and the alfalfa-leaves thick upon his hat and jumper.

"Look at that," he cried, thrusting a letter into Dowser's hand. It was from Clyde, in New York.

"Read it, neighbor, read it," the old fellow shouted; and Dowser, opening the folded paper, read:

> dere folks,
>
> wen im back ther wont be no more seein the world fer me i done seen all i needs ter see. I never knew wot a mess o water ther wuz beleve me you ort ter see my arms i tell you you kin lay off all your help wen i cum home the see is fine fer them wot like it but not fer me. i will be home in five or six munths they say with luv from yr son
>
> Clyde.

The old man was beside himself with delight.

"You folks has got something wrong in your systems, neighbor, that's all," he said, as Dowser, smiling, shook his head.

" 'T'aint not natural nohow fer no person to want to fool away time on the water thataway. No siree. My boy's got a heap more sense than some folks give him credit fer, I reckon."

"De Witt, I guess we're not all built alike," said Dowser. "I'm glad for your sake and your wife's that he is coming home. I'll bet you won't know him."

When Nance, visiting Mrs. De Witt that evening, heard of the letter, she smiled.

"You folks wot likes a mess o' salty water better nor good dry dirt ain't not natural, nohow, Miss Nance Dowser," said the old woman. "That's all there be to that. My, jest ter think o' spendin' a whole year on a ship."

"Maybe you're right, Mrs. De Witt," laughed Nance. "I guess I'm one of the crazy ones."

"Well, you kin jest stay as crazy as you've a mind to, miss, so long as none of us ain't likely ter be a-catchin' of it—that's all I got ter say!"

VIII

IN JULY news came from the *Fancy Nan*. She was loading for San Francisco and Tattersall was going to drive her home. Nance was delighted.

"Pa," she said, "when she goes to sea again I want to go with her. May I?"

Dowser shook his head.

"Nance," he said, "I'm too old to go to sea. I've lost out. My days are done."

She sat on his chair, her arms about his neck and her cheek against his.

"Pa, dear, you don't have to go on the bridge. The bark's got plenty of cabin space, hasn't she?"

"Tattersall won't go unless I'm sailing her, girl. We went to sea together, and we sailed together year after year, ever so long before you were born. He's a bit queer about it; but he's absolutely obstinate. If I went to sea as a passenger he'd resign and go in the foc'sle—or try to."

"Tell me all about it, pa. What made him that way?"

"Too long a tale for now, dear. It would take a whole dog-watch. I'll tell you some time, maybe."

"Supposing you stayed ashore, and I went, don't you think Mr. Tattersall can take care of me? Can't I take care of myself? Why, pa, I can work out a position just as well as you can."

"Shoofly hasn't much use for a woman aboard ship, girl," he answered.

"Well, I guess Shoofly don't own the *Fancy Nan*, does he? I reckon he'll take whatever cargo you want to ship, won't he, pa?"

"Suppose I don't want to ship it, Nance?"

"When you were twenty, did you want to stay ashore, pa?"

"I was a boy—that was different."

"Then you want me to grow hayseed in my hair already?"

"We'll see—we'll see when the time comes. I'm glad you're not like young De Witt, girl. I wouldn't like that."

"Perhaps she'll get a charter for the islands—a nice short trip; could you stand my being away that long, do you think?"

"Maybe I could get along without you that long. It would be hard though. We'll see when the ship comes in, eh?"

"All right, pa. We'll charter for the islands, the colonies or Valparaiso—all nice short runs and close to home. Why, you would scarcely have me out of your sight."

"We'll see when the time comes, Nance."

For Dowser the time came all too soon.

He called Moses to his room one day.

"Moses," he said, "the ship's coming in. Nance wants to go to sea with her. What'll we do?"

Moses, dreading the sea, shook his head; old, and knowing that once upon the open water the pangs of rheumatism would assail him.

"I can't go, Moses. What'll we do?"

Moses frowned. He was seventy and past, and looked eighty; but his arms, lean though they were, were sinewy and strong and his eye was clear.

"I'm good for a few voyages yet, sir," he said.

"Can't you talk it out of her, Moses?"

"Did you talk her mother out of it, sir? When the old *Nanette* left port, twenty years ago? It's in the blood. What's in the blood must come out."

"I might get a charter for the islands; or at farthest for the colonies. I couldn't stand to send her round the Horn unless I were there too."

"That'll be all right, sir. I'll be there—Miss Nance will be taken care of."

"Moses, I suppose I'm an old fool. There's no sense in being afraid of letting the girl go to sea. Tattersall is the best sailor between the poles; and the bark a fine, well-fitted sea-boat. But I don't seem able to help it. A sort of dread has hung over me ever since that calm on the line, twenty years ago."

"I wish you'd not changed the ship's name, sir."

"——! You don't believe any rot of that sort, do you?" cried Dowser, starting.

"Captain Dowser, I've been a-many years at sea, an' seen queer things happen—as any man what follows the sea will. It's not for me to contradict any one. But I don't like to see a ship's name changed, sir. I can't help it."

"Well, it's done; and that's all there is to it. I reckon it won't hurt any one. If you can talk the girl out of her craze, so much the better. I hate to let you go with her. You're too old."

IT WAS the middle of Summer when Clyde De Witt came home. Seeing him, as he stepped on to the porch, his old mother shouted—

"Well, I swan, paw—look who's here."

Rushing from the dinner table and through the kitchen door, she flung her arms about the neck of her son.

Young De Witt, patting her gray head, kissed her hair.

"Maw," he said, "don't you git ter takin' on so. I ain't drowned. Pinch me, maw. I'm all alive an' a-kickin'."

Sniffing the air—

"Maw," he said, "what's fer dinner?"

She fled from him to the stove, and from the stove to the table, setting plates and dishes in profusion; shouting to De Witt to run to the separator house for a jug of cream, crying to her son—

"Set down, set down. My, but I guess you be starved."

Sitting opposite him, she watched him eat. Old De Witt, who never laughed, grinned.

"Clyde," he said, "you're growed."

Pulling off his coat, Clyde hung it over the back of his chair, refilling his plate; his mother hedging him in, pushing dishes toward him, refilling his cup, saying continually—

"My, but I guess you be starved."

Rolling up his sleeves, he bared a mighty arm.

"Feel o' that, paw—got any hay ter pitch?"

Old De Witt looked at the arm of his son, home from the fenceless meadows, and slowly shaking his head, grinned.

"Maw," he said, "what d'ye think of our boy?"

Mrs. De Witt, rising from the table, ran around to her son and throwing her arms about his neck cried—

"He's his maw's baby—that's what he be."

Her baby, his mouth full of dill pickles, kissed her.

"Clyde," she cried, "you ain't tried maw's chow-chow—you got to try that."

Clyde, reaching for the chow-chow and filling his mouth, kissed her again. He lay back in his chair, wiping his mouth.

"Maw, you don't wanter founder me, do yer?"

"Land sakes alive, Clyde!" she cried, "you ain't ate nothin'."

When Nelson called that afternoon they brought him in to see their son.

The old man shook the boy by the hand, welcoming him home.

"I was to have been a sailor too," he said. "I had two brothers once, and both of them was drowned at sea. My father, he was drowned at sea. I was to go to sea too; but my old mother, she cried it out of me. 'Peter,' she says, 'let's go to America, and forget the cold sea.' That's how I come to America. We was from up by Bergen way. It's fine to travel about and to see things. But my old mother, she cried me away from the sea."

Mrs. De Witt stared at the old man and, running to her son, threw her arms about his neck, kissing him.

The day following Clyde's return De Witt went to a dairy auction some distance from home, to be gone all day; and Clyde, with a team and wagon, went to town to attend to some farm business for him. In town, just outside the bakery, he came face to face with Ora Kelly; a tall girl with butter-color hair and pigeon-blue eyes.

Clyde had not seen a girl for a year—a year of hard work on shipboard, among hard men. For a moment he seemed to lose his breath, almost to gasp. Ora, a smile of welcome overspreading her face, held out her hand to him. He, fresh from the sea, his own hands rough from hauling on the salt ropes and gear of a ship, took it and held it; its softness fascinating him. Looking into her pigeon-blue eyes, his own lips parted, he watched a faint pink steal over her cheeks.

"Ory," he said, "c'mon in."

Her smile broadened and, accepting his invitation, she entered the bakery with him. Clyde, home from sea, jingled his money in his pocket.

"Ory, what ye goin' to hev?" he asked her; and fed her upon ice-cream, filling himself at the same time, raising his head to ask—

"How's the folks to home, Ory?" And to gaze at her butter-color hair and pink cheeks.

"Say, Ory, you're a-goin' to drive with me, ain't you?" he asked, remembering that they were far from home; and then, without waiting her answer, remembering his wagon, and looking at her starched frock, went to the phone, calling an employment agency.

"You folks send me a teamster, right away—tell him to jump along," he said.

And the man coming, showed him the team, and told him where to take it.

Calling a livery barn, he and Ora were in a few minutes driving together along the road toward the Upland farm.

Passing the road that branched off to Ora's home—

"Clyde," she cried, "the folks 'll be a-wonderin' what's come to me."

"Let 'em wonder," he replied, slipping a wiry arm about her waist, "you're a-comin' over with me right now—after a bit I'll take you home, never you fear."

Arriving home, he waved an arm, encircling the buildings with its sweep.

"I'm a-goin' ter fix the old place all up, Ory—fit fer a gal like you ter live on," he said.

Ora blushed, wriggled her waist a little closer into the bend of his arm, and said nothing. She was used to country lovers—but here was a lover indeed.

When he returned from taking Ora Kelly home that night Mrs. De Witt fell upon his neck and wept, her cup of happiness brimming.

IX

THE *May Flint*, homebound from Cardiff to San Francisco, lumbered through the seas, approaching the Horn, preventer sheets upon her upper topsails and weather boardings round her taffrail. Nearing the cape, she sent her royal yards to deck, preparing for heavy weather.

It came; the Horn gales meeting her as if they had long awaited and watched for her coming, driving upon her with a fury that appeared unending. Sprays froze upon her deck houses and shrouds until she was coated with ice. For four full weeks she beat into the weather, until, at the closing of a day, catching a southerly wind, they crowded sail on her once more—driving her westerly. At midnight, the wind moaning from afar in the darkness, they swarmed aloft to shorten sail again.

On the weather fore yard-arm sat John Lowrie, her mate, hauling out upon the head earring; for they were reefing the foresail.

"Coming, sir?" shouted the sailor beside him, lighting out on the sail.

"Aye, coming it is—haul a little more."

The sailor hauled, his fingers raw from weeks of hauling frozen canvas.

"How's that, sir?"

"All well—tie your reef points," answered Lowrie, shouting above the whine of the rising wind. He lay back to take one more heave upon the earring, lashing it fast, and cried suddenly—

"Oh ——!"

Clutching the yard with both hands, he held to his perch, trying to breathe, a needle seeming to stab his side. The pain passing, he lashed the earring, and followed the hands from aloft.

A week later, standing one evening beside the skipper on the bridge, Lowrie put a hand to his side, wincing, a red hot needle stabbing him again. The pain passing, he coughed, harshly, dryly, with a racking sound. The skipper looked at him curiously, asking—

"What's wrong with you, Lowrie?"

"Nothing to speak of I guess, sir," he answered. "I got a sort of a spasm awhile ago on the fore-yard and it seems to come back every once in a while. Be all right soon, I guess."

As the *May Flint* sailed northerly Lowrie's cough became more and more pronounced, and he grew pale and thin; refusing to lay up even for a day.

The skipper, looking up the word "cough," studied his medicine book. Unable to sleep, Lowrie gained uneasy rest in a half-sitting posture and, never rested, became irritable about the decks, ordering men upon absurd jobs, and swearing at sailors who did their work with seamanlike exactness.

They talked about him in the foc'sle; and old sailors, going to the bosun, shook their heads.

"The mate's going crazy," they said. "He's crazy now—there ain't no suitin' him."

"Sick or crazy, I don't know which; but he's going to spill the ship over if he ain't watched," replied the bosun, and went to the second mate.

"He's a sick man," said the second, shrugging his shoulders.

There came a day when the railings were being painted. The *May Flint's* railings were white; and Lowrie set men to work upon them with every shade of color in the paint locker. The skipper, seeing from the bridge that there was something wrong, went to the deck and spoke to Lowrie.

Lowrie, looking at him, was shaken by a fit of coughing, putting a hand to his side.

"Better come and lie down," said the skipper.

The bosun took charge of the deck; but in a few minutes Lowrie was back, staggering and swearing at the hands. The bosun, motioning to a sailor, they took his arms and tried to lead him away. He struggled, and becoming suddenly sane cried:

"——! What's the matter? I'm all right."

He tried to shake them away from him, but, with the hands looking on, they forced him to his room. No one had ever seen such a thing—a mate gone crazy at sea.

They lay him in his bunk and he sat up and coughed, a hand to his side; the skipper coming to look at him, puzzled; the medicine chest all but empty, holding nothing save a bottle of salts and a bottle of linseed oil. Going to it he mixed a glass of salts, bringing it to the mate, who sat up, holding it to his lips, trembling, his forehead hot, his side burning. Hearing the lap of the sea against the ship's side he sprang from his bunk, spilling the salts.

"——, sir! I'm all right," he said; the skipper holding him back; he struggling; and the carpenter and bosun coming from their dinners in the cabin, helping to quiet the sick man, lifting him back to his bunk; he lying prostrate, exhausted, the three of them watching him till he fell into an uneasy sleep.

"We may have to put the irons on him. He's liable to get dangerous," said the skipper, adding— "the salts are all gone—I don't know what to do for him."

It was the talk of the ship.

The bosun took his watch, while he lay in his bunk; waited upon by the steward, bringing him the fare of the sea—salt beef, pea soup, hard tack, canned vegetables, or canned tripe and onions.

The hands liked him, and, coming to the quarter-deck, inquired for him.

"Reckon 'twas that time in a boat, off the Horn, that started it, sir," one of them said one day, asking the second how the sick man was getting along. The second, never having heard of it, asked what he meant.

"A week in a boat, sir, off old Stiff—picked up when the hands with him was about dead. They say that if it hadn't been for him, sir, they'd all have died."

The second speaking of it to the skipper, the skipper opened his eyes.

"That must have been the *Tekoa*—I heard about that."

Shaking his head he went to Lowrie's room; Lowrie staring at him, coughing.

"Mr. Lowrie, were you with the *Tekoa* that time, sir?"

Lowrie nodded, whispering, hoarsely, a hand to his side—

"Six days—in an open boat—" falling back, exhausted by the cough; the skipper watching him; his lips moving—

"Nance—" and, "I'm coming back, sir—you know what for—" smiling, he fell into a restless sleep.

X

THE tug took the *Fancy Nan* outside the heads, and let her go. The wind was offshore, fresh from the northeast and, lifting her heels, she danced to the tune it piped. They gave her her wings—courses, topsails, topgallants, royals, staysails and main skysail, gaff topsail and spanker.

Nance Dowser, by the taffrail, watched the shore-line fade. There was no ship upon the sea. The *Fancy Nan* was alone; the horizon shining as a gate wide open, with the sea-winds blowing through; the land a haze, growing rapidly fainter; the seas about her green, and blue to the westward.

Mr. Tattersall stared into the weather.

The mates, passing Nance, touching their hats, crying—

"A fine breeze you've brought us, Miss Dowser."

The helmsman, a tow-headed man with broken teeth and a tobacco-stained mustache, stared at her, letting the ship, luffing to the wind, swamp her fore-deck with green water.

"Watch your course there," shouted the mate.

The helmsman, muttering, "aye, aye, sir," scowled at the girl, as the mate went forward.

The sun dipped under the sea-rim, leaving a sky aflame, shining with ribbons of scarlet and draperies of gold; a darkening sea, green along the ridges, shadowy black in the hollows; stars twinkling, hiding their lights beyond frayed curtains of cloud.

Old Moses, on the quarter-deck, buttoning his coat across his chest, shutting the wind out, watched the shore-line fade.

In the fo'csle they talked of Nance; jesting, speaking of the women they had known ashore.

"She's the owner's daughter," said one.

"T' —— with her—a ship ain't no place for a woman," said another.

A little narrow-faced man named Billings, a fellow with a penetrating voice, shouted—

"I wisht I was the —— mate."

A large man, sitting half-naked, sewing buttons on his jumper, threw a sea-boot at him. It struck him full, and falling backward against the bunk, he swore at the sewer.

"You thinks you are —— smart," he yelled; the sailors about him rocking to and fro with laughter; men from the watch on deck peering through the open ports, asking—

"What's the joke?"

A voice called along the decks, and the watch ran to haul on the braces, checking the yards in; brace blocks rattling, and spars groaning high in the darkness, the sailors' voices mingling with the drum of the wet wind through the spray-dripping rigging—

"Yo-o-o-o-o-o- oh-oh-oh-oh- ho-ho-ho-ho-haul-away-oh."

Nance watched the yards swinging against the stars; the ship taking the wind on her quarter, running as a hound runs toward the hunting-meadows. At midnight she went below, to dream of old Nelson talking under the cottonwoods.

Day broke over a blue sea; the hands scrubbing the decks down by first dawn, scouring away the harbor grime, talking amongst themselves of the ship.

"Too much brass work, all soo-jee moo-jee," said one.

"These Yank clippers ain't no good for a man to go to sea in," said another.

"No, you looks like you was raised in a starving limejuicer," muttered a third scowling in remembrance.

"A man what follows the sea is a —— fool, any way you takes it," said an old man, a murmur of assent arising as he spoke.

"Get those rails swabbed off—look alive there!" said the mate, coming among them.

Bending to their work they were silent, rising to scowl after he had passed. Toward afternoon it blew up, and they took the topgallants off, snugging her down. At sunset, the wind falling, they set them again, singing as they sent them to the mast-heads,

"As I was walkin' down the street,
oh! roll the cotton down,
A dainty lass I chanced to meet,
oh! roll the cotton down.
I hoisted up my numbers high,
oh! roll the cotton down,
Says I 'I likes your rovin' eye,'
oh! roll the cotton down."

Day fading, night swept over the sea-roads; a boundless glory of starshine. The weeks passed by, the *Fancy Nan* holding to her course day by day, with a trade on her heel.

Moses, below in the cabin, unbuttoned his coat as she sailed through the tropics; gazing through the cabin ports, watching the white horses racing the clipper; thinking of the farm and of Nelson and of the cottonwoods beside the gate; wishing he were there, home again from the windy meadows.

The bark made a fast run out, and Nance wrote to her father:

Dear Pa:

Captain Tattersall says I brought him luck. We kept a leading wind all the way to port from the Golden Gate. We'll be home soon. Coming home we will drive her, pa.

Moses is well, and so am I. When we get back the leaves will be breaking on the cottonwoods. You must have the ship's numbers flying, or I shall get lonesome for her again. Perhaps we shall overhaul the *May Flint* on the way home, and leave Mr. Lowrie shaking his fists at us. Won't that be fun, pa?

She made a row of crosses under her letter, kisses from beyond the sea; and bade him not be lonely. She would soon be home.

AT SYDNEY two of the hands deserted and had to be replaced. On the day she went to sea the new hands came aboard. There was a little man with a battered sun-downer on his head, a faded red shirt and a pair of dungarees so patched and mended that scarce a foot of the original was left, what with red patches, and with blue patches, and bits of canvas at the knees. He wore a wide leather belt with a big brass buckle in front of it, to hold him together, and came aboard bare-footed; a twisted blackened old pipe between his bearded lips.

The other was a man named Bock, a German, from the slums of Hamburg; over six feet tall; a man with immense arms and legs, and a terrific chest; with a yellow, pock-marked face, and red-rimmed watery eyes.

They came over the gangway together, carrying the old man's sea-chest—a great box built of camphor wood; something that the old fellow had traded for or bought or maybe stolen from a sailor's boarding-house; or that had maybe been given to him by a drunken, or by a dying sailor. It was covered all over with paintings of square riggers under sail, and with crossed flags; and for handles had rope grummets, parceled and served, made maybe, in the dog-watch, on the line or in the trades—or maybe in the fo'csle of a ship hove to off Stiff.

Bock carried his dunnage slung over his shoulder in a long white canvas sack that somehow looked like a sailor all sewn up and ready for his burying, the way it hung, limp and lifeless, across the back of the man who bore it. Half-way across the gangway the old man stayed to rest, letting his end of the sea-chest down. Bock shouted at him, leering down upon him from his red-rimmed watery eyes.

"Come along, old Blood-and-bruises!" he said.

The little man looked up at Bock, and down at his patched dungarees—patches of red and of black upon the old faded blue.

"Aye, that's right. Blood an' bruises it is. You follow the sea long enough, an' you'll be Blood-an'-bruises too."

The mate called to them—

"Get forward there."

And the two sailors, answering, "Aye, aye, sir," lifted the camphor wood sea-chest and bore it forward to the fo'csle; the men in the fo'csle greeting them with curious glances, nodding toward the empty bunks.

"Skipped, did they?" asked Bock.

"Starved an' buried at sea, m'lad—same as you'll be. Ain't grub enough aboard this here packet to feed such a one as you."

Bock turned to the little man.

"Come on, old Blood-and-bruises," he said, "get this old ditty-box out of the gentlemen's way."

They all laughed, looking at the little man; and putting the sea-chest down, he turned to them.

"Aye! You'll be Blood-an'-bruises too, if you follows the sea long enough," he said.

"Skipper got his wife aboard?" asked Bock.

"The owner's daughter. 'Ow 'd you like to be the —— mate?" said Billings.

Bock leered at him, his yellow teeth showing through parted lips.

From the deck the mate's voice called.

"Loose the tops'ls—four hands aloft. Man the windlass." And they hurried to the deck.

Once more the bark was heading toward the open sea.

Moses, on the poop, beside Nance, rubbed his elbows; stiff with rheumatism; looking over the boom-end, as if trying to see home, beyond the sea. There was a beam wind, and the hands came aft to haul the spanker out; Bock and Billings staying to set the gaff tops'l after the others had gone. Billings, climbing into the mizzen shrouds, to go aloft, bent down toward Bock, whispering——

"I wisht I was the —— mate," and Bock guffawed, leering at Nance, standing with her back toward them, forward, at the break of the poop.

They gave the *Fancy Nan* all sail, and she burrowed her rail under, drenching the hands with a spray as they gathered aft at eight bells. At supper that evening Nance asked the skipper—

"How many days to Frisco, Mr. Tattersall?" And looking at her, seeming to listen to the cry of the wind on deck, he answered—

"My last voyage, Miss Dowser—my last voyage must be a fast one, eh?"

The mate looked at him, thinking, wondering, dreaming that maybe he could step into the old man's shoes; glancing at Nance; wondering if perhaps he could get any show there—going to sea with a ship like the *Fancy Nan*, and with a wife like Nance Dowser, the owner's daughter, aboard. "Ah, that would be high times," he thought.

"Nice girl, sir," he said, after Nance, arising, had closed the door behind her.

"Women's out of place on a ship," grunted the other, and followed her up, through the chart house, to the poop.

"We'll doll her up this trip, sir," he said to the mate. "I want her to be looking her best when she comes in."

The mate nodded, "I like a trim ship, sir," he said.

The bark, holding leading winds and fair weather, they started to put the shine on her, holystoning the decks fore and aft, and dressing them with hot oil; scouring the poop-deck with sand and canvas; and the topgallant rails, and fife-rails, and skylights, with pumice and oil. As she came toward the equator she began to glisten. Men, hanging in bosuns' chairs beside the swaying masts, painted them from topmast to deck. Men were aloft overhauling, blackleading, and painting brace blocks; reeving off new foot ropes, and tarring down the standing rigging, with varnish in the tar; so that the rigging flashed when the sun shone upon it.

The old man, rising from his knees, after four hours of holystoning, staring down at his dungarees muttered to himself—

"Blood an' bruises—the big stiff was right; that's wot it is—blood an' bruises."

Men, tired of the unceasing fine weather, and longing for a blow, growled at the constant scouring and painting. In the dog-watches, when the day's work was done, they were called out to sweat up sheets and halliards; resenting it; cursing under their breath, at the sea, and ships, and mates, and skippers. The breeze grew lighter as they neared the line, and the heat more intense.

"She'll pick up a breeze one of these days, and foot it for Frisco," said Tattersall. "Get the work done before the wind comes—she's likely to be taking water aboard when she gets a start."

The hands, kept at work in the heat of the line calms, sat about after the sweating up was done, too exhausted to sing or to dance; muttering hatred of the sea and ships; vowing that it should be their last voyage; quarreling amongst themselves; accusing one another of being liars, and shirkers, the older ones jeering at the ignorance of the young; the young sneering at the yarns of the old; all of them looking toward the poop, snarling at a sight of the skipper.

Old Sinclair, the oldest man amongst them, was consumed with jealousy for Bock, who, owing to his size, as well as to the foulness of his speech, had become a sort of leader in the fo'csle.

Bock was a man posessed of immense strength, his weight upon the ropes a source of constant wonder to the entire watch. With the exception of the two old men, who openly derided him, no one ventured to cross him; the narrow-faced man fawning upon him, currying favor, saying—

"Wait till we gets to Frisco, mate—I'll show ye a thing or two there."

Bock grinned at him, his yellow teeth showing; leering, his red-rimmed eyes glinting with foul anticipations.

Sitting beside him upon the hatch, Billings would grin at him, saying—

"If I was as —— like an ox as you are, Bock, I'd go an' ask 'em to let me work—s'welp me ——, I would. I'd show 'em, by ——, they wouldn't put one on me."

Bock grinned back at him—a grin of contempt, mistaken by Billings for flattery.

THERE came a morning, when the sea was smooth as glass, when Billings, aloft on the main, dreaming of the long-shore delights awaiting him, spilled tar from the pot slung to his belt; spattering the starboard quarter boat with numberless tiny specks of black. Calling him from aloft the mate asked—

"What in —— are you trying to do?"

He whined to the mate, lying:

"Mister, I got a touch o' the sun, an' didn't know wot I was doin'. S'welp me, sir, I didn't."

The boat, hoisted clear of the chocks, and the chocks knocked from under her, Billings and the old man were set to work to clean the tar from her paint work. Inured to the sea, the old man scrubbed diligently, in silence; Billings scrubbing when the mate was near by, and idling at every opportunity. The paint, old and flaky, came off in patches, and the old man, scouring the boat's bow, stepped suddenly backward, with an exclamation. "Wot's the matter, Blood? Wot's all the noise, eh?" asked Billings.

The old man pointed at the bow of the boat and Billings stepped to look.

"——," he said, staring at the faded lettering upon the bow, "D." Turning to the old man he asked—

"Blood, wot the ——'s the rest of it?"

He beckoned to a man working on the deck near by, pointing to the letter, saying:

"Look at that, eh! They've changed 'er —— name—changed it, see?"

The man, looking up, went back to his work, mumbling to himself.

At eight bells, when the watch went below, they stood about the fo'csle door, gesticulating, pointing to the boat swinging clear of her skids; telling of ships that they had known, which, having had their names changed, had met with speedy dooms.

During the first dog-watch the wind came up in a stiff squall, with a deluge of rain, and they clewed up and furled the skysail; the wind abeam, and the ship racing while the squall lasted. In a little while it was calm again, the horizon on all sides overhung by squalls. Tattersall went to and from the chart house, studying the barometer. Shortly after two bells another squall passed over her, and she again raced upon her course.

"Two or three more squalls like this and she'll pick up a steady trade and foot it for home," said Tattersall, watching her go.

That night there was a full moon, silvering a motionless sea, over which, in the distance, squalls crossed and recrossed their tracks.

Shortly after seven bells, Tattersall, on his way below, stopped to look at the barometer again and, looking out of the chart house, called to the mate.

"Keep her as she is, sir. Don't take the royals off her if you can help it. I don't think you'll get anything stiffer than what we've had. Call me if there's any change."

A few minutes later, Nance, walking the poop, was joined by Moses, and stood beside him leaning on the taffrail.

The ship lay, with her yards on the backstays, on the starboard tack.

To windward a black mass was slowly overspreading and obliterating the sky.

Eight bells went, and the wheel and lookout were relieved; the voice of the lookout man crying along the deck—

"A-l-l-l-l-l-'s well, sir."

And the mate replying with the customary—

"All right."

Billings, leaving the wheel, was relieved by Bock; giving him the course, and, as he did so, whispering:

"You wait till we get to Frisco—I'll show you something then."

Going to the bridge he repeated the course to the mate, who, peering into the binnacle, buttoned his oilskins against the torrent that was beginning to fall.

Leaving the poop, passing beneath where Nance and Moses stood, he heard Nance's voice.

" 'With the rain before the wind tops'l halliards you must mind,' " she was saying, quoting an old proverb of the sea.

Billings, with the swift instinct of a coward, hesitated as he left the poop; loitering below the boat, thinking to himself that the ship might spill over; remembering that he had seen another name upon the boat and, recalling the tales to which he had listened in the dog-watch, becoming suddenly afraid.

As he stood there, directly beneath the break of the poop, where Nance and Moses stood, the squall caught her.

It came, unheralded and instant, in one terrific blast.

The mate, shouting an order, swung himself from the bridge; rushing toward the halliards—the ship reeling over beneath his feet, leaving him clambering, his hands outstretched before him, up the awful incline of her decks; his voice carried away and lost in the fury of the wind.

Moses, grasping Nance by the arm, shouted in her ear.

"The boat! Get to the boat!"

Nance, steadying herself, bracing into the wind, felt a sudden horror upon her; letting him push her toward the boat, shoving her before him, under the bridge rail and on to the skid, shouting the while.

"The boat! The boat!"

Reaching the gunwale Moses climbed over, and turning, seized Nance by her wrists, dragging her after him.

The ship lay as a creature stricken a death blow, trying to go ahead, but held down by the fury of the wind upon her sails; reeling far over, her spars pointing to the darkness above—hove down, and helpless in the wind and sea. Not a sail had carried away, nor a rope parted; the excellency of her rigging had doomed her.

As she lay over, trembling in the first fury of the squall, Tattersall rushed from the chart-house, shouting—his voice carried away, lost in the night.

From beneath the skids, Billings, terrified, rushed for the boat; seizing her stern and swarming over it; stumbling into Moses who yelled at him.

"The falls! Stand by to cut the falls."

He drew his knife, and, standing at the falls, sawed them with a dull edge. As he stood there, stunned by the wind, drenched by the torrent that hissed upon him, a huge body bore him down, shouting as he fell:

"The falls! Cut the falls."

Bock, seizing the falls, waited with them in his hands.

The *Fancy Nan*, without a tremble in all her length, lay as if stunned; her spars pointing higher and higher into the night above her.

Suddenly, as it had smitten her, the squall passed away, and stars shone upon the hove-down bark. The night was utterly still, save for a faint seething from leeward where the squall swept along the sea.

Voices called along the deck, crying orders, shouting indistinguishable jumbles of words—every accent clear upon the death-like silence of the surrounding sea.

The moon, stealing from the squall to leeward, silvered the sea, shining upon the gilded trucks and upturned golden yard-arms of the *Fancy Nan;* glistening all along her varnished weather rigging, and her burnished brass work; each shadow of her railing, shrouds and spars and of her white and lifeless wings standing distinct upon the decks and on the water.

It was but a moment that she lay, helpless and beautiful, hove down beyond the power to rise, before, in the space of a breath, she disappeared from the spangled pathway of the moonbeams upon the midnight sea.

In the track of the moonbeams there floated a boat, alone upon the water.

In her stern sheets sat Nance Dowser with Moses standing beside her, and amidships stood a gigantic sailor, at whose feet there crouched a narrow-faced man who whined, driveling—

"They went an' changed 'er —— name."

XI

DAWN came over a mirror-like sea, and Moses, taking the sail that lay rolled in the bottom of the boat, stretched an awning over her astern. Before dawn, finding a water-beaker and a small supply of biscuits he had moved them into the stern sheets. Toward dawn Nance had fallen asleep, and now, hurrying lest the two sailors who slept outstretched in the bows should awaken, he went quietly about his business, dropping overboard pieces of a broken oar, and the hatchet that lay in the locker, and moving the oars, lashed them securely to the thwarts, aft, so that no one could move them from forward.

When the men awoke he was sitting staring across the sea.

Bock, awaking, stretched himself, yawning, and, kicking Billings, cried—

"Rise and shine there, you sleeper—rise and shine."

Billings arose, crouching in the bottom, staring over the water, searching for a sail; and, seeing nothing save the sea and the sky, turning to Moses, asked—

"Wot about some eats, mister?"

Moses tossed him a small package, saying—

"Make it last—it's all you'll get."

Billings, scowling at him, asked—

"Who in —— made you skipper, eh?"

Moses, making no reply, put his hand inside his coat, drawing out an old pistol; and after looking at it, and across the sea, replaced it.

Billings looked at Bock, whispering—

"The old ——, did you see that, eh?"

Bock looked at the old cook, meeting his eye, silent, expressionless.

"Wot about some water?" asked Billings; and Moses, filling a tin pannikin, set it upon a thwart amidships, saying:

"That does you till tomorrow—make it last."

The pannikin held a quart. Billings looked up at Bock, questioning.

Nance, awaking, gazed about her, and, laying her head down, cried—thinking of Mr. Tattersall, and of the *Fancy Nan*.

All day she sat silent, with wet eyes; Moses passing her food, telling her to eat.

"We'll be picked up pretty soon, miss," he said.

As night fell he whispered to her:

"Stay awake a while, miss, and watch for me. I've got to get a little snooze. If either of them move this way wake me, quick."

Toward midnight he awoke, bidding her sleep, apologizing for having slept so long. Bock was asleep, but Billings was sitting wide awake, staring at Moses, through the moonlight.

"Mister," he said, "I'm perished for a drink— this big devil he swiped more nor his share today."

Moses made no reply. At dawn he passed their water forward; and Bock, taking the pannikin, put it to his lips, draining it, grinning. Billings screamed with fury and with fear.

Nance begged Moses to give him more water; Moses shaking his head.

Toward noon he bade Billings pass the pannikin and, the pistol in his hand, passed it back, a quarter full, saying—

"Make it last."

Billings stared at the pistol, and scowling at Bock, sipped the tepid water, smacking his dry lips.

"Wet your clothes—you'll get a little water that way," said Moses.

Billings did so, drawing his shirt over his head, thrusting it deep in the sea.

Moses, dipping a bucket overboard, wetted the awning that sheltered Nance; and served her regular allowances of food and of water.

Nance, sitting with her head bowed, cried—thinking of the *Fancy Nan*, and of Mr. Tattersall; of her father who would wait between the cottonwoods.

That night, when Moses lay down to sleep, she sat awake, staring across the water toward the shores of home; thinking of the things that had happened in her life—of the voyages she had made; and of the day that they picked up the *Tekoa's* boat; and, so thinking, fell asleep.

Bock was asleep; Billings lying in the bottom pretending to sleep, watching her. Seeing her head nod he waited a few minutes, then, rising quietly, stole softly aft. He was all but at the water-beaker when Moses, sleeping as a weasel sleeps, awoke. Springing up, his pistol in his hand, pointing it at Billings, he pulled the trigger.

Laughing in his face, pushing him aside, Billings made for the water-beaker, snarling.

"To —— with you."

He bent over the beaker, his lips dry, his throat parching.

The old cook, dropping the pistol overboard, put his hand under his coat, and, bringing out a short iron belaying-pin, paused a moment, staring around the horizon. There was nothing save the sea and the sky to be seen. With a swift motion he brought the pin down upon the back of the thirst-maddened sailor's head; and Billings, dropping in the bottom of the boat, crumpled and was still.

Looking to where Bock lay sleeping, Moses bent down. With a great effort he raised the warm limp body to the gunwale; and holding it there a moment, let it go. With a splash it disappeared in the sea.

Nance stirred in her sleep, and, sitting beside her, Moses watched until she slept soundly. Then, rising to his feet, stood watching Bock. Bock, lying outstretched, immense and hideous in the glow of the yellow moonlight on his sallow features, made no motion.

When dawn returned three great fins cruised slowly to and fro, forward and back again, around the boat.

Bock, awaking, looked about him, searching for his shipmate. His lips parted, his irregular teeth showing, he stared at the fins cruising around him; the cruisers, swimming close beneath the gunwale, watching him as he stood above them. Turning, he stared at Moses, and grinning, passed the pannikin aft.

When Moses returned it, with half the previous allowance, he looked at the old cook from eyes that glistened strangely.

That day Moses cut down his own allowance of water; wetting his clothing regularly in the sea. All day the sharks cruised to and fro, watching; coming so close that it became impossible to put a hand in the sea.

When night fell Moses told Nance to lie down and sleep, and far into the night sat watching Bock. It was midnight, when, as the moon arose high above them, the big sailor began to nod, and Moses, watching him, presently knew that he slept.

For a long while he remained motionless, watching the sleeper, his eyes fixed steadily upon him.

At length, creeping forward, slowly, every sense alert, he stole behind the snoring sailor and stood upright, peering into the moonlight, searching the sea. There was nothing save the sea and the sky to be seen. He waited a while, staring all around the far-off horizons; the sleeping man reclining against the side of the boat at his feet.

Putting his hand under his coat he brought out the iron belaying-pin; and once more waited, looking over the sea. There was only the sea and the sky beneath the golden moon. He crept a step nearer to the sleeper, who suddenly, moving uneasily in his sleep, half-awakening, made as if to arise. With one swift stroke the old sea-cook brought the iron belaying-pin down upon his skull and crumpling, he lay, his great limbs twitching horribly, in the bottom of the boat.

Soon he was still, and Moses, bending down, tried to lift him; struggling in the yellow moonlight with the huge body, unable to move it. With the quiet precision, of a seafaring man he unlashed the oars taking the ropes from them and lashing the dead man's feet; making the handy-billy tackle from the locker fast to them, and slowly hauling the body forward, raising it across two oars laid fore and aft in the bow.

At length, unhooking the tackle, and unlashing the ropes, he threw them aside; standing with the corpse steadied across the boat's bow. Placing his arms under it with a quick heave he rolled it overboard; and involuntarily sprang backward as the fins sped, converging, toward the spot whence, from the motionless sea, bubbles arose.

Gazing for a few minutes about the horizon, he went aft; and lying down at Nance's feet was immediately asleep.

Morning came again, and Nance, gazing around, shuddered, trembling at the great fins sweeping to and fro; gasping with horror as a monstrous shark, swimming close to the boat, seemed to watch her as it passed. Terrified she knelt in the bottom of the boat, hiding her face in her hands. Hearing her moving, Moses awoke, soothing her, saying that it could not now be long till they would be picked up. Staring at him, she asked where the others were—for not till now had she missed Billings.

"They drank sea-water, Miss Nance," he said. "They drank sea-water and went crazy in the night. They jumped over the side, miss."

Shuddering, she huddled in the bottom of the boat.

That day the old sea-cook cut his allowance of water yet more; doling it to Nance in tiny drops, making her drink slowly; keeping her mouth moist; pretending to drink himself; gulping eagerly at the beaker-plug.

She thought he drank.

Night coming again, she slept peacefully, as if in her cabin aboard the bark—or in her room beneath the cottonwoods. Moses slept fitfully—staring across the sea in search of help.

Another day came and went; Moses still gulping at the water-beaker, pretending to swallow; passing her small allowance of water, and telling her to drink slowly; keeping his face from her—lest she see his lips.

Another night came, and again she slept, awaking refreshed. Again he gave her water, bidding her drink slowly.

When the next day came he no longer spoke to her—his lips too dry for speech. That night she slept fitfully, and, awaking, found him lying at her feet. Staring at him, she called to him by name, her own voice frightening her. Filling the pannikin brimful she pressed it to his lips, he staring into her eyes, shaking his head; motioning the pannikin away, pushing it toward her lips; she begging him to drink—he motioning her not to spill the water.

That night, when the moon arose, the old cook lay still, his head in her lap; she yet trying to put the pannikin between his lips. His head drooped and, dropping the pannikin, she screamed.

When morning returned she still sat with his head in her lap, under the awning, the pannikin at her feet. Picking it up she drained the beaker into it, holding it to his blackened lips, the water trickling down his white beard.

By noon the water was gone.

The sharks cruised to and fro, tireless, expectant—unseen by the girl who, crouching in the bottom of the boat, held the dead cook's head in her lap.

XII

THE *May Flint* was sailing northerly, a light trade on her quarter. Her skipper was taking her mate's watch; for the mate dozed in his bunk below, raving when awake about an open boat, and calling to a woman named Nance. The sun shone on a sea scarce rippled by the cats-paws that crossed it; every sail upon the great four-master gleaming white as she crept lazily across it. Upon her fo'csle head two men watched the porpoises at play beneath her bow. Far away a school of bonito, hunting the flying-fish, churned the sea to a lather. Putting a hand to his brow, watching the leaping bonito, one of them cried:

"Look over there—see? Two points on the beam. What is it? Can't be a boat, can it?"

The other, looking, turned toward the deck, his hands to his lips.

"Boat on the lee beam, sir."

There was a rush of men to the deck, crowding to the shrouds. The skipper, fetching his glasses from the chart-room, looked away on the beam.

"All hands on deck," he cried. "Helm up there! Square the cross-jack yard. Some of you clear away the port boat."

The helm was up, the braces checked in, the ship paying off down the all but indiscernible breeze, as the boat, dropping to the water, cast off and sped rapidly ahead of the slowly moving ship.

Coming up with the derelict boat, tossing their oars they swept alongside her; the second mate springing over her gunwale, peering under the awning that stretched over her aft.

"Two of you here, quick," he ordered as, raising the awning, he saw a girl who lay against the side of the boat, with the head of a white-bearded old man in her lap.

Lifting him from her, they laid him down, and, raising the girl, bore her to their boat; seizing the oars, straining upon them, making all haste to the slowly approaching ship.

Sitting in a running bowline, Nance Dowser in his arms, a sailor was quickly hoisted to the deck of the *May Flint;* the boat speeding back to the derelict.

They carried Nance to the skipper's bed, laying her gently down; and, bringing water, forced it between her swollen lips, trying to make her swallow; bathing her face and shoulders, and her scarce moving breast, with the cool water; chafing her hands, and speaking to her in gruff voices. Opening her eyes, she gazed at them, standing above her, her eyes frightened, her white hands motionless beside her.

They forced a trickle of water between her lips and, swallowing it, she leaned eagerly forward for more. They gave it to her, a very little at a time, still bathing her face and telling her that all was well. Presently she sank into a deep sleep, and they stole away, leaving one of their number to watch beside her.

With the old man in her bottom, the derelict boat was hoisted to the deck of the *May Flint*. Lifting him, they laid him on the quarter-deck; the sail-maker kneeling at his side—a man handy with a needle, taking measurements. They stood by while the sail-maker stitched, bare-headed, respectful to an old man with a white beard. They awaited the words of the skipper, reading from a little book, holding the canvas-shrouded form upon the railing—awaiting a sign.

They lowered him gently, easily, into the still, blue water, watching the white form slowly sink from sight.

The sea-cook of the old *Nanette*, and of the *Fancy Nan*, had gone to last anchorage. The pains of rheumatism would trouble him no more.

They searched the boat, looking for a sign of her name; and upon her bow found faint letters, faded and indiscernible.

"Look here," cried a man; "she has had two names. It must have been a ship whose name had been changed."

They gathered about her, looking, shaking their heads—old sailors confirmed in life-long superstitions—young sailors convinced of the truth of sea stories to which they had listened in the dog-watches.

XIII

NANCE, awaking thirsty after a long sleep, was given water; the skipper of the *May Flint* asking her what ship she was from, and she, puzzled, looking up at him from frightened eyes.

On the following day they led her to the poop, hoping that the sight of the ship, and of the sea, would bring her memory back to her. Leading her to the skylight they left her sitting there, looking straight across the sea, her mind a blank, overpowered by the horror of the open boat.

Under a steadily freshening wind the *May Flint*, with her royals on, was booming toward San Francisco, sprays slapping over her, green seas dropping their crested heads upon her waist.

Drawing near to port the wind hauled northerly and was colder. John Lowrie, in a high fever, stabbed with a hot needle, feeling the cold, coughed, tossing restlessly from side to side.

Upon a bright afternoon the *May Flint*, creeping to anchorage off the ferries, furled her topsails.

The skipper took the port doctor to look at Lowrie.

"Get him to hospital—he's rotten with pleurisy. He'll be all right with a little care. What have you been doing for him?"

When he heard, he shook his head, smiling.

"You deep-water sailors are stouter than oxen—any one else would have gone under," he said.

Going ashore he took Lowrie with him, and to St. Mary's hospital; where, between cool sheets, he breathed more easily and slept in comfort—muttering in his sleep from time to time a woman's name, and saying—

"I'm coming back, sir."

The news that the *May Flint* had picked up a derelict boat spreading along the waterfront, the papers next day carried large head-lines; and printed rumors gleaned from sailors paid off from the *Flint*, and invented by imaginative reporters.

> The name began with D, but had been erased, probably in painting the boat. The captain refuses to let any one see the woman who was rescued, in which he is upheld by the doctor. She is said to have gray hair, and is presumed to be of middle age.

Reporters, going aboard and looking at the boat, did not see that there had been more than one name on her.

On the following day there appeared in the overdue list the name of a London full-rigger, the *Ditton;* and again the papers carried large head-lines.

The *Ditton's* skipper had his wife aboard; and the skipper of the *May Flint*, knowing the *Ditton* to be a slow old hooker that could barely have been where he had picked up the derelict boat, was puzzled.

Beneath the article on the supposed loss of the *Ditton* were these words—

> A sailor from the *May Flint* has the peculiar superstition that the boat was from a ship whose name had been changed, and was therefore unlucky.

On the day the *May Flint* came in, Dowser, on the River Bottom farm, read the head-lines. There was, as yet, no mention of a woman having been picked up. The skipper of the *May Flint*, sorry for Nance, and anxious to protect her from the curious, had thus far kept it quiet.

On the following day, reading the news again, Dowser muttered:

"Shoofly was right—a woman's out of place aboard ship. Another ship gone, and skipper and wife with her—better than for one of them to have been left, though."

Nance, sitting in the cabin of the *May Flint*, silent and frightened, was seen by several doctors brought to see her by the skipper.

"Time—it'll take time. She may come out after awhile," they said.

A week later, a full-rigger came in from sea with her fore-topgallantmast carried away, and anchored off the ferries close to the *May Flint*—the ship *Ditton*, of London.

Going aboard her, the skipper of the *Flint* brought back her skipper, and his wife, to his own ship with him. While the woman talked to Nance, getting no reply, the two skippers searched in the lockers of the boat.

The skipper of the *Ditton*, drawing something from the locker, held it up; showing it to the skipper of the *May Flint*, saying—

"What in ——'s name is this?"

"A doll!" replied the other, "there must have been a child aboard."

A young reporter, anxious for news, prowling below them, hearing what they said, hurried ashore.

Next morning, when the paper came to the River Bottom farm, Dowser cried:

"My good God! Could it have been the *Fancy Nan?*"

That evening he boarded the *May Flint*, looking a moment at the boat, then striding through the cabin door.

"My girl—where is she?" he cried.

The skipper of the *May Flint* left them together.

* * *

THE River Bottom farm, subdivided and sold, has ceased to be. The Upland farm is still there, though larger than it was; for old De Witt bought up some of his old neighbor's acres, stretching his own fences out toward the river-bluffs.

Old De Witt is very old now; but may still be seen, at haying time, bringing a team from the hay-fields. His farm is the wonder of the countryside. He has a foreman, who works under the manager—for the old man has long since turned the management over to his son, Clyde.

Neighbors, bringing their wives and children, often come to visit. Ora, Clyde's wife, is very gracious to them all, and very proud of her husband. They look at him admiringly, asking him questions of the world out-side, and listening to him telling strange tales of the sea and of ships.

As the conversation lapses the old foreman speaks:

"I was to have been a sailor too. I had two brothers once, and both of them was drowned at sea. My father, he was drowned at sea. I was to go to sea too, but my old mother cried it out of me. 'Peter,' she says, 'let's go to America and forget the cold sea.' That's how I come to America. We were from up by Bergen way. It's fine to travel about and to see things. But my old mother, she cried me away from the sea."

Beside the water, at Sausalito, there is a little house, overgrown with flowers, and surrounded by tall trees, beneath whose shade there often sits an old man, gazing across the bay—watching the steamers come and go.

Sometimes, very seldom now, a square-rigger steals in upon the wind of afternoon and he, arising, peers hard at her through his glasses—as if expecting to see some well-remembered numbers breaking at her peak.

At his side there stands a woman, whose dark hair is intermingled with shining strands of gold, and threads of silver; watching, with him, the ship that comes to anchorage.

Sometimes, when the China mail comes in, a lean-faced man with quiet deep-brown eyes, stepping from the ferry, comes to the little house to stay awhile; sitting with them of an evening in the flowery garden, and going, as the mists arise upon the bay, to sit before an open fire in a room whose windows look toward the distant city.

Upon the wall there hangs the picture of a clipper ship, with her three skysails set, her lee railing awash in the sea; beside it another, of a little bark, with hands aloft stowing the royals as she comes to anchorage.

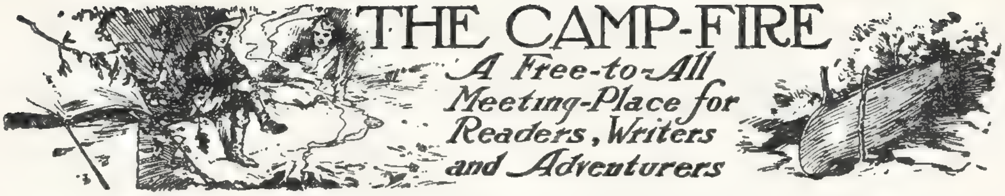
Above them hangs the picture of a dark-haired woman; below the picture of a girl.

Sometimes they stand together, arm in arm, looking at the pictures on the wall—and sometimes go to stand before a little shelf on which there sits an iron-headed doll—the idol of these people of the sea.

INCENSE

by Sherman Ripley

THE incense rises gray in a lazy spiral sway
  To a thousand gods from here to Hindustan;
And I've seen it floating there round the heathen idol's hair
  Up to where the gilded temple dome began.
Aye, in many a mystic shrine where the jeweled idols shine,
  And where the sacred crocodiles are fed,
The incense climbs and turns as the holy fire burns,
  And clouds the dingy arches overhead.
In the cherry-blossom isles where majestic Buddha smiles,
  And 'cross the bay along in China, too,
Where tall pagodas rise, pointing fingers at the skies
  The curling incense clouds the temples blue.
In Burma where the palms swing their ever graceful arms,
  In a place the simple tourist never goes,
There's a mosque of teak and jade with an incense-burning maid
  Wearing bangles on her coffee-colored toes——
I've foregathered up and down, with both yellow men and brown,
  And I've seen the incense weaving strange designs;
But the incense that I love, as it winds its way above
  Is the smoke of my own camp-fire in the pines.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine, John Joseph follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself. With something about speed on the draw.

To answer your rhetorical question, Yes, comrade Joseph, that is what the City does to people. I've lived in one twenty years, lived in it or commuted to it. It's treated me well enough in a material way and in friends. But every year the City seems to me more cruel, more greedy, more vain, more foolish. Most people come to it through greed, vanity or for the license they call "freedom." Some through ambition or the stark need of making a living. Then the hectic, artificial, soulless City does the rest.

NEW YORK? Being the biggest City, it is most narrow-minded, has less sense of proportion, less understanding of real values than the others. And it isn't an American city. Real Americans are very much in the minority; a sea of foreign faces, a babel of foreign tongues. Only the commuting trains show a strong percentage of Americans.

The other night after the theater we walked the street looking for people we'd "really like to know," with no distinctions of "class" or wealth. We found two people, an elderly man and woman, apparently man and wife of meager means, and I'll bet my last cent they were from out of town. No, we weren't fussy or snobbish—all we asked was outward evidence of realness, unspoiled humanness, ordinary decency and enough brains to assay horse-sense. Of course there are many thousands of such in New York, and of course after the theater is a poor time for such a search. But——

Stop me, for I've only just started. But you young chaps who are thinking of going to the City, think it over a while longer. You "statesmen" who make our laws and shape our destiny, forget for a while the -isms and -ics of economics and politics (and the "what I can get out of it" angle) and jar your systems by doing a little easy, independent, original thinking along simple, fundamental lines. If, for example, your technical, political little brains evolve the shop-worn idea that immigration can't be turned, from the spots where it is not needed and is harmful, to the places where it could, comparatively, do real service, forget your silly, artificial theories and confront the fact that *Canada does it*. And, O mighty solons, you might give some of your august attention to seeing that the present restrictions on immigration are thoroughly and honestly enforced.

FINES as a legal penalty seem to me as silly as they are unjust. The rich man pays and goes free, the poor man can not pay and goes to jail. The rich man, or even the man of very moderate means, prefers paying to jailing. Often the amount of the fine is a trifle compared to the financial profit of breaking the law. If we were fair and meted out absolutely equal justice, and if we *really wished to stop*, well, graft, for example, graft in all its myriad ramifications throughout our political and economic structure, we'd deal almost exclusively in penitentiary sentences with a good healthy minimum term fixed for each kind of offense. I hope I'll live long enough to see penitentiary terms for grafters and betrayers in public office that will make the penitentiary terms for lesser crimes like burglary, manslaughter and arson look like week-end visits.

I TRIED once to stop and this time I'll do it. Comrade Joseph's feeling about killing elk fits in with a discussion that now and then crops up at Camp-Fire:

Weiser, Idaho.

To Camp-Fire Comrades: I like the word "informally" as used in the editor's invitation to "stand up among you and introduce myself." I am an informal sort of a cuss, myself, you know, with scant respect for many of the conventions of the skim-milk and tiddle-de-winks bunch, and what I shall have to say to you will be said without frills.

I WAS born and raised on an Iowa farm. I say "raised" with perfect confidence, because it fits the case—perfectly. I was usually raised, for instance, at four-thirty in the morning. Later in the day it sometimes happened that I was "raised" on the toe of a cowhide boot. And all too frequently I was raised in the woodshed—and elsewhere—on the business end of a four-foot "water-sprout." In time the peculiarities of this method of "raising" a boy had what might be termed a cumulative effect, and so it came about that quite early in life I sought other—if not greener—pastures.

Indian Territory listened good, besides being handy; I went there. Texas listened good; I went there. Denver listened good; I went there. Since then a lot of other places listened good, and usually I went there. Silver City, Idaho; California; Mojave Desert; Death Valley; the Blue Mountains; Cripple Creek; all listened good with the usual result. And, lest there be some doubt upon that point, I should add that the old saying about rolling stones and moss has held good down to the present moment.

I HAVE lived outdoors, slept in the far places with the "sky for a roof and the stars for candles," or in a tent or rough cabin, boy and man, for thirty years. I have hunted most kinds of big game at one time or another, but never had the heart to kill an elk, or a chance at the "Kadiac" bear, the granddaddy of them all. I have prospected for "mineral" all the way from Cripple Creek to the Blue Mountains; from the Powder River Range to Death Valley and back again. I have "broke" horses, minded cows, driven "freight," operated many kinds of machinery, sold goods on the road, lived with hoboes in the jungles, run poker-games, dealt faro and roulette, tended bar, studied law, learned "short" and typing, mined hard rock. I have beaten my way thousands of miles on trains, hiked other thousands across mountains and deserts, and still feel like a rank amateur when I read about the real travelers—whose ramblings have taken in the *world*.

I have come in contact with millionaires—men whom the world calls "successful"; I have met the down-and-outer who has given up hope—*quit*. Of the two I prefer the company of the down-and-outer. He has more of the spirit of fair-play, far more real experience; he will divide his last crust or his last dime with you. And he won't hesitate about it or ask you what you did with your Summer's wages. Lastly, he frequently has the better brain.

ADVENTURES? Yes, now and then—years back. I haven't space for anything of that kind now, however. Later, perhaps, I may pass something along to the Camp-Fire comrades, but not now. The most impressive thing I ever saw could hardly be called an adventure; nevertheless I believe it will interest you.

It happened in Frisco.

I stood one evening on a Market Street corner and watched perhaps ten thousand people parade past. Perhaps a dozen abreast, the City was pouring its office people into the Ferry Building, on their way to Oakland. For an hour I watched them, mostly in groups of twos and threes, hurrying nervously along. And, except for the shuffle and click of their shoes on the pavement, there wasn't a sound. Not a laugh or a smile, not a word: Looking straight ahead, faces tense, stepping quickly, scowling: Fat and sleek men, lean and haggard men, bearded old men, youths with the first thatch of down on their lips, worried-looking women. They were well dressed—every one of them. White shirts, derby hats, canes, tie-pins, rings, watch-chains, all the outward appearance of prosperity. But every single countenance in all this host had the same stamp of worry, of gloom and impending disaster. What was the matter? Why all this gloom? Why all this appearance of stress and worry? Does the City break its people this way?

I was studying law at the time—I went straight home, grabbed Mr. Blackstone by the collar—so to speak—and put him out of business. I tore up several other law-books, then bid my suitcase and trunk good-by and hit the trail.

I LIKE to associate with common, every-day people; people who say what they think, people without pretense or hypocrisy—the kind you meet in the far places. I am interested in their troubles, their plans and hopes and fears. I like to study odd types, to listen to their camp-fire tales, to fathom their motives. To me the study of human nature is the most fascinating thing in the world, the only thing really worth while. Everything revolves around that.

In conclusion I might state that I now own a trunk and have a little something—not much—to put in it. This trunk is now three years old goin' on four. I have typed over five thousand pages during this time (three years), some of which has been printed. It is a fascinating game and I hope to be able to continue—to the end.—JOHN JOSEPH.

AND here is a word from a letter concerning his story in this issue:

Writers of Western stories have built up a wholly false notion among magazine readers in regard to the speed "on the draw" of the old-time Western gun-man. I realize, however, that your readers fairly "eat" that sort of stuff, and it is useless to set anything else before them. It remains a fact, however, that nine out of ten gun fights were won by subterfuge or some sort of preliminary maneuvering, or by some trick. As far as I am aware this phase of the subject has never been exploited in fiction, and the inclosed story is the result of an attempt to describe some of these encounters without falling short of the reader's expectations in the matter of speed "on the draw."—JOHN JOSEPH.

HERE is the other side. Uncle Frank Huston read M. W. G.'s letter in a former "Camp-Fire," got hot under the collar and wrote the following:

California.

He says "took place after the Civil War." It occurred the morning of the 29th day of November, 1864, at Sand Creek, Colo. Ter. See Sen. Doc. Vol. II for 1866-1867.

Art. 6 of Treaty of Oct. 14, 1865, with confederated Cheyennes and Arapaho reads: "The United States, being desirous of expressing its condemnation of, and as far as may be, to repudiate the gross and wanton outrages perpetrated upon certain bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians by Col. J. M. Chivington, in command of United States Troops, on the 29th day of Nov., 1864, at Sand Creek, Colo. Ter. *While the Said Indians were at Peace with the U. S., and Under its Flag Whose Protection they had by Lawful Authority been Promised and Induced to Seek:*" (the italics mine) see Sen. Doc. above quoted.

A board of Commissioners appointed by President Lincoln investigated and their report may be had from the War Department on application composed among others of Gen. N. J. Taylor. Pres. J. B. Henderson, M. C. Gen. John B. Sanborn, Lieut. Gen. Wm. T. Sherman, Maj. Gen. Wm. S. Harney (note Harney, old Indian Fighter from Tippecanoe, to Florida, Texas, and the entire West) Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry, Maj. Gen. C. C. Auger, S. F. Tappan, and others.

The tribes were promised by Maj. Wynkoop protection and induced to come to Fort Lyon where the troop could afford the requisite care for them. Later Maj. Anthony, relieved Wynkoop, and caused the Indians to be removed to Sand Creek 40 miles distant from the fort and, though protesting, the Indians, believing that the promise of the Government would be kept there as well as at another place, removed in a body.

ANTHONY later said he had them sent there "so the regular troops could not protect them when the Volunteers were ready to kill them off." See. Sen. Doc. Vol. II, page 46.

One Eye, a chief, was paid $125 per month to act as scout against the hostiles who had not come in, bringing news and repeatedly frustrating movements and raids against the whites. He was killed in the massacre by the whites while endeavoring to help them.

Territorial Governor Hunt said, "We have always regarded Black Kettle and White Antelope as special friends of the whites since I came here; I never heard of any acts of hostility committed by them or with their consent, nor attributed to them by others."

Senators Foster, Doolitle, "Honest" Ben Wade concur. "It is difficult to believe that beings in the form of men, wearing the uniform of U. S. Officers, could commit or countenance the commission of such acts of cruelty and barbarity. Col. Chivington deliberately planned and executed a foul and dastardly massacre which would have disgraced the most savage among those who were its victims.

"Women and children were killed and scalped, the latter at their mothers' breasts, the bodies horribly mutilated, the bodies of the women profaned in sickening manner."

THE report is too long to give here in full, but I will cite some few of the findings, that you may see what "those old-timers who braved unheard of hardships" were actually like.

M. W. G. says that the troops were hastily gathered. They were the Third Colorado Cavalry, and had NOT taken any part in what is known as the Rebellion but were used for local purposes solely; their colonel had been a preacher.

There were but few arms in the Indian camp. (Mind, I am giving what the Lincoln Commission *found*.) Nearly all the chiefs and warriors were tolled away by Maj. Anthony's orders to give Chivington and his white fiends a clear and dangerless field. At the first shots, Little Antelope ran out calling, "Stop! Stop! Mistake!" Then, seeing that the attack was premeditated, folded his arms and stood motionless until murdered unresistingly.

THREE troopers successively shot at and missed a three-year-old child; missing it, a fourth stepped up and remarking. "See me knock the little — —!" fired and killed it. A non-com dismounts and cuts ears and scalp from a wounded Indian, leaving him to be killed by another. An officer took a scalp with a long silver tail. A squaw with a broken leg was struck by a trooper with his saber, breaking her arm; she rolled over in her agony, screaming, and he struck and broke her other arm, with a filthy joke regarding it.

One squaw, escaping, saw a trooper thrown from his horse and ran and caught the animal, calling to the white to come and get it. Thinking to show that she was a woman, she opened the front of her dress, showing her breasts, saying, "Me squaw!" The trooper placed the muzzle of his revolver between her bosoms and killed her.

Some of the bodies were sickeningly mutilated so that even some of the murderers revolted.

Black Kettle, the principal chief, took no steps in retaliation, saying, "It was a mistake. The white men did not understand." He removed his people later as far as possible from white associations and, until himself treacherously murdered while at peace, remained what Gen. Harney said of him: "I have worn this uniform for forty-seven years, but Black Kettle is as true a friend to the whites as I am."

Yet, this same friend of the white man, having led his people, as he thought, to a place where there could be no friction with the whites, was hunted down secretly at his camp on the Washita (while, mind you, he was at peace), himself and the majority of his people promiscuously slaughtered or driven naked away to perish in the snow of a Kansas Winter before the dawn of another day. Surprizing and slaughtering a peaceful and unsuspecting people who were trying at the expense of not only comfort but hardships to avoid trouble.

The records of the Huns in Belgium are as the records of a children's Sunday-school picnic, compared to that of the 3rd Colo. Cav.

THE records of the War Department will bear me out. I just naturally could not keep silent. If any of the readers of this doubt and can not find opportunity to look up the War Department records, then just go to your Public Library, ask for Mrs. Helen Hunt Jackson's "Century of Dishonor," and get a brief transcript of the evidence in the case.

Mrs. Jackson was of course a novelist, as witness "Ramona," but the first book I have mentioned is not one of her fiction stories but a compilation of Federal Records gathered in her fight to aid the Poncas in their suit against the clique of War Sec. Belknap (impeached) and Carl Schurz.—UNCLE FRANK.

AS TO his complete novelette in this issue Bill Adams has the following to say. (He is B. M. Adams, but he likes to be called Bill because of the many here and in France who have called him that and meant it.)

This, a little yarn of the dog-watch, is dedicated to the memory of the old crowd, who, with me, inhabited a clipper's half-deck in the good days that are all too long gone by. To *Will Clegg*, *Tom Swift*, *Alphonse*, and many others like them, and to the laughing eyes of *Tim O'Leary's* daughter.—BILL ADAMS.

WE WANT to know what stories in the magazine you like best so we can print more like them. Help us by sending in at the end of the year the names of the ten that you consider at the top of the list. Mark down your favorites as you go along.

IN CONNECTION with his serial beginning in this issue Arthur D. Howden Smith gives us interesting facts concerning the times and place where the story is laid:

Brooklyn.

The story of "A Son of Strife" is laid in the Holy Land—Outremer, the Land Overseas of the Middle Ages—at the time just preceding the downfall of the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem before the statesmanship of the great Saladin, who found in the union of the different Saracen states the means for crushing the invaders.

STRICTLY speaking, the story covers the reigns of three Kings of Jerusalem, Baldwin III, who died in 1163, his brother, Amalric I, who died in 1174, and Baldwin IV. Most of the action, however, is confined to the final years of Amalric's reign and the opening year of the younger Baldwin's before the unexpected curse of leprosy descended upon the heroic boy-king to cripple him physically and mentally and add the final touch to the collapse which attended the removal of the strong hand required to control the turbulent barons. But this story has to do only with the opening of Baldwin's reign, which was as glorious in promise as any preceding episode in Crusading annals.

LEST any one suppose I have exaggerated his prowess and ability, let me say that in one battle before Gaza, in 1178, with only 370 knights he defeated Saladin's host of 26,000. This exploit is admitted even by the Saracen chroniclers. In 1179, while on a raiding expedition, he became separated from his army, and with only Henfrid of Toron, the Marshal, fought his way through the Saracen army. There is not space for all his exploits, many of which were conducted after he had succumbed so utterly to the ravages of disease that he had to be carried in a litter at the head of his army. In 1183 he became so ill that he practically abdicated in favor of his infant nephew, Baldwin V, but he was not satisfied with the regency which followed, and in 1184 we find him dragging his racked body into action to unite the conflicting factions, whose main composition and tendencies I have tried to sketch into the story.

He died at the end of 1184 or early in 1185—we are not sure of the exact date. And with his death anarchy took firm possession of the land. The end came in the disastrous battle of Hattin on July 4, 1187, in which King Gui de Lusignan, brother-in-law of Baldwin IV and father of the deceased Baldwin V—whom he had succeeded—and the True Cross were taken. The Christian host was numerous, and should have been capable of victory. But the quarrels of the factions and the lack of a trusted leader were insuperable handicaps.

WHAT I have tried to do in this story is to give a truthful representation of this period, which has never been treated in fiction, although the subsequent attempt of Richard Lion-Heart to recover Jerusalem has furnished inspiration for many story-tellers. I have attempted, also, to give an accurate portrayal of methods of thought, social customs, habits and the details of the daily life of the time. In *Matteo* I have sought to present a type of the remarkable class of men who were the predecessors of the poets, novelists and journalists of to-day.

Wherever it has been possible I have selected real characters to use. Amalric and Baldwin, for instance, were substantially as I have shown them. Bohemond is faithfully reproduced. *De Chappes* is a composite of several barons, but especially of Milo de Planci, whose name is introduced in the later chapters. Father William of Tyre, of course, was the great historian of the land. Saladin I have described, in the one brief scene in which he appears, exactly as he is delineated by the Frankish chroniclers. Sinan and his amazing cult were no less savage and bizarre than they appear in this story.

THIS sect was established in the latter years of eleventh century by a Persian adventurer, Hasen ben Sabeh, who traveled widely in the East, lived for a time in Egypt and settled finally in 1190 in the stronghold of Alamut, or "The Vulture's Nest," in the mountains south of the Caspian Sea, which became the center of his activities. Early in the twelfth century the sect was established in Syria, and acquired by conquest and purchase the ring of fortresses in the Lebanon, which safeguarded the castle of Massiaf, the western capital of the order.

Sinan became chief of the western branch of the Assassins in 1169. He refused to recognize the superiority of the contemporary lord of Alamut, and reorganized the Syrian sect along original lines. The old chroniclers endow him with the personality and qualities which I have emphasized, and the prevailing theory of his strange power was that it was based upon the kind of trickery he attempted to play upon *Matteo* and *Ali Ma'akwaa*. Marco Polo says that the chief of the sect in Alamut devised the idea of drugging men and then placing them for a time in a Nirvana where their wills were molded to suit the master's ends. But in any case it is supposed that the Syrian branch exploited the same device.

Hulagu, one of the sons of Genghis Khan, destroyed Alamut in 1256, and Bibars rooted out Massiaf and its attendant fortresses some years later. But for several hundred years the Assassins wielded uncanny influence over the affairs of the Near East. Sinan, by the way, did make precisely such an offer to Amalric as *Matteo* carried for him. He was more afraid of the Christians than of the Saracens, but the collapse following upon the illness of Baldwin IV convinced him that Saladin was the force to be reckoned with. He is a strange, sinister figure, a bare outine against the background of history.

IN THE Splendid Battle I have described veraciously tactics by use of which the Crusaders so often won against enormously superior odds. Hattin, for instance was a case of a battle where the time-honored precepts were abandoned. Richard Lion-Heart practised them at Arsouf, and so defeated Saladin in the contest on which hinges his chief claim to military repute.

It was, by the way, precisely by such raids as that of *Gui de Taberie* upon the caravan that the Saracens were finally infuriated to the point where they were willing to lay aside their own private misunderstandings. The siege of Nerak by Saladin and Achmet-ibn-Muros was paralleled by Saladin's attempt to take the neighboring stronghold of Kerak, where the famous French adventurer Reginald de Chatillon was marrying his daughter to a son of Henfrid of Toron. Kerak then was crammed with jesters, minstrels and other entertainers, besides guests; but its immense walls withstood all Saladin's assaults. It was never carried by assault, and at length capitulated months after the battle of Hattin only when the whole of the land down to the seacoast was in Saracen hands—ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH.

WHO should drop in at the office one day but that old-timer Algot Lange after six years timbering in the Amazon bush—ten years he's put in there altogether. He'd spent a month or so in the Adirondacks on returning. but, even allowing for that, one could hardly believe he was just back from years in the tropics if one didn't know it for a fact. Complexion as clear and fresh as a daisy. Robert Simpson, who came in with him and who, as you know, spent years in Africa on the Niger Delta, was as amazed as I.

Mr. Lange's recipe for keeping in perfect health under the conditions is a simple one and one I vouch for as absolutely infallible. This is it: "Never go to the Amazon the first time."

He expects to be in the U. S. Forestry Service from now on. No more Amazon, he says. Robert Simpson and I give him two years in the States.

SOMETHING from W. C. Tuttle as to his complete novelette in this issue. As you know, he was born and raised among the people he writes about and knows them.

Hollywood, Calif.

Skeeter Bill is real. His name is not *Sarg*, but he is known as Skeeter Bill. He is just as I have painted him, physically. Skeeter and his folks were very active in the sheep and cattle war in Wyoming, but Skeeter is tamed now. He played a bartender in one of my pictures, and wailed because the bottles were not filled with real liquor. He points with pride to the fact that lack of physique saved his life.

Seems that two men were shooting at Skeeter, who hid behind a post, which was eight inches in diameter. Their bullets scored both sides of the post, but Skeeter was untouched. Skeeter was telling about his brother and explained, "He ain't so heavy set as I am." A friend of mine met Skeeter, drifting along in the desert. He asked Skeeter where he had been. Skeeter looked back, shook his head sadly and said: "I had a —— of a lot of fun, but nobody'll believe me. I've been herdin' ostriches." He had been employed by the owner of an ostrich farm.

The character of *Judge Tareyton* was drawn from life—booze, appearance and all. Drunk or sober, he was the perfect gentleman. He had ideals, but drowned them in hooch. I have wanted to put him in a story for a long time, but did not until I met Skeeter Bill, whose character appealed to me. A cowboy said to me, "Skeeter Bill ain't nc actor, but he's jist as reliable as ——."

The incident of the lawyer refusing to drink with the man he had saved was taken from an incident which happened in Montana years ago. Colonel Sanders was the lawyer. Of course the incident of Skeeter turning the tables on the lawyer by declaring himself guilty was my own invention. The rest of the story is fiction, with a touch here and there of real occurrences. I hope you will thank me for not letting Skeeter Bill win the girl. Yours,
TUT.

P. S.—Here is another one by Skeeter Bill:

He was poking along in the hills on a steep hillside, where the trail was very narrow, when he saw an Indian coming down the trail. Skeeter knew the Indian very well. The red was riding a young and rather skittish horse. Skeeter stopped and the Indian rode up, taking the lower side.

Skeeter threw his leg around his saddle-horn, reached out to shake hands with the Indian. Skeeter's sudden movement frightened the Indian's horse, which whirled and bucked down the hill. The Indian was thrown into a mesquite clump. Skeeter watched him disentangle himself, and then yelled:

"What went wrong, Pete?"

The Indian rubbed his scratched face, looked down the hill and then up at Skeeter.

"Too —— much how-de-doo!" he snapped.—TUT.

Still More About Our Expedition

Here are abstracts of opinions from still more letters concerning our Expedition. This collection together with the two already printed give to all of you the benefit of opinions thus far expressed. The next thing is a vote to bring this matter into definite shape and get things really moving.

Colon, Panama.

A million places to dig up "dope" making very interesting reading—the Javary region (covered by Friel's stories); Peten district of Guatemala (Mayan civilization); the "back-end" of Yucatan.—W. E. BRANDON.

Baltimore, Md.

Am for (1) anything (such as deep-sea soundings and the new deep-sea diving apparatus) that will further the theory of the lost continent of Atlantis; (2) Aztec and other ruins of C. A. and S. A.; (3) the Friel territory.—VICTOR E. SCHMINKE.

Ione, Wash.

Up the Amazon, covering countries reached by its tributaries. Embrace: climate, soil, animal life, drugs, natives, wood and other commercial opportunities.—A. S. ALBERT.

Trujillo, Honduras.

German cruiser sunk in 95 ft. of water up coast from Bocas; lot of specie reported in her; Edgar Young and others once talked of trying it. Pearl fishing along C. A. coast and mother of pearl; if have auxiliary schooner, would always be chance of coconut cargo at reasonable profit. Count me in up to $500. $10 limit only for non-participants. Museum plan also appeals. Against $1 shares if names printed—would fill up magazine with names. —FISHER TATUM.

Evanston, Ill.

Instead of expedition, 10,000 $10 shares to buy strip of land in Canada or the West; make hunting-lodge the only improvement; caretaker and assistants, also for guides. If too many members apply for privileges, select by ballot; should be almost self-supporting from furs, etc.; if hunter takes them away, a nominal charge; if not, furs sold by caretaker.—C. FRED MUELLER.

Germantown, Pa.

Why not under the auspices of the National Geographic Society?—MARGARET F. V. MACRAE.

Hays, Pa.

Scientific research; will give us the satisfaction of having contributed something valuable to the records and knowledge of this world. Photos or antiquities might be a source of revenue; also animal, bird and insect specimens. Unexplored S. A.—L. W. DREESE.

The next, from a radio operator who offers his services gratis, is representative of other letters which can't be printed because of lack of space. In cutting the printed letters down to the bare bones of their suggestions, don't forget that I'm taking out the enthusiastic endorsements of the plan. Believe me, there's no lack of enthusiasm.

New York City.

A little old $10 bill and some more little $ bills just waiting for this thing to be organized.—ED. S. HACKSON.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

Lt. Col. P. H. Fawcett, R. A., F. R. G. S., in *Travel* for July, 1916, records his expedition for the "lost city of the Chibchas" in S. A. Pizarro and Raleigh sought it for its wealth. Fawcett believes it no myth. Found a tribe who knew difference between stars and planets; whose women and men lived on equality. Farther on, cannibal tribes almost as low as beasts. Beyond these, by native report, a land with *houses of stone*. His party of four too few; even ten would take chances.—CHARLES KELLY.

Oswego, N. Y.

According to Myer's "General History," after sacking Rome Alaric led his Visigoths to southern points of Italy, where he died. His warriors turned aside the little river Busentinus in northern Bruttium, built a tomb in its bed, buried him with his jewels and trophies, turned the river back into its channel and, so that the spot might never be known, killed the prisoners who had done the work.

These spoils from the sack of Rome and the richest parts of Italy must be most extensive collection of Roman antiquities known to exist. No report of this treasure ever being found. Why not have this carefully investigated in all its phases? The rewards of success would be incalculable.—INTERESTED READER.

Baedeker's "Southern Italy," 1873 edition, p. 199, says Alaric was buried in the Busento, a branch of the Crati (or Grati). Grati seems about 40 miles long, with branches of not more than 10 or 15 miles. Must be pretty positive basis for statement of burial; Gibbons, Merrivale and all authorities state it without the reservations responsible people make when in doubt of evidence.

Hutchinson, Kas.

Will gladly donate $50 and more if needed. Scientific research. Should make mighty interesting reading if done by a writer all can understand. —J. C. CHANSON.

New York City.

Marshall R. Hall's suggestions best so far. Form permanent incorporated organization, International Adventurers Club or Ass'n., to further science, make public knowledge of places little known or unknown, bring back lost ships, treasures, specimens, relics, etc. Membership $1 one year, $2 two years, etc., $10 life, over $10 honorary. Small dues for a New York headquarters to answer correspondence. Bank cashier to countercheck accounts for deposit; full set of books; with subscriptions members send votes for permanent officers and on list of places suggested for exploration. Members share equally in any profits, regardless of size of membership subscription, but are pledged to eventual $10. Permanent quarters in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis, New Orleans, Kansas City, San Francisco? In all parts of world? Look at the immense possibilities—a world-wide brotherhood of friends closely allied because of main interest in most fascinating of all things—adventure, friends from a thousand camp-fires all over the world to gather for news, pleasure, comfort, thrills and the glad hand of friendship.

A portable wireless outfit. Writer of expedition wires reports to members near Copyright Office for copyright and relay for newspaper syndication. Motion and still photographer with expedition, pictures to be shown or sold throughout country.—HERMAN E. ERICKSON.

The following suggests a permanent organization whose membership cards would be essentially the same as a lottery ticket. Aside from possible legal complications the idea of choosing by lot those who are to go on the expedition seems to me unpractical. Men thrown together at random, however good as individuals, are pretty likely to wreck any chance of the pulling together that is necessary. If you were organizing an expedition to be led by you personally, would you pick your men by lottery or according to the personality of the men themselves and their likelihood of pulling together?

Fort Wayne, Ind.

Profits divided between participants and club treasury. Two classes of members—tenderfeet and old-timers. To qualify for latter, affirm on honor your ability to pass a set of requirements determined by a council of experts and published in magazine. Balance expedition between the two classes. Physical examination for all, and all to be clean, honorable men of white race. Council would select a half-dozen expeditions and their leaders; publish; members select by vote the most popular expedition and leader. Then notify participants and plan final details.—R. E. STUART.

Tulsa, Okla.

Against museum. Applicants send brief but pertinent qualifications to a Camp-Fire committee of at least five. Camp-Fire readers in each State will notify magazine if willing to serve upon selection committee of their State; A. S. H. select committee from those in one vicinity. No committee passes on applications from its own State. Each committee selects 10 names; these with qualifications published; readers vote for those to go on expedition. Committees would also select destinations to be published for vote.

Go to an exciting place even if we never get the treasure. Why not form an Adventure Club?—JOHN PAUL JONES.

Think a minute. Suppose our system of Stations had already grown to be as big as it will some day be and that each, as most of them will some day do, had become a local center for all comrades living near it. What a wonderful voting machine that would make! Not only for the expedition but for any question of general interest among us, including of course votes on most popular stories, proposed changes in the magazine, etc. Or on the question of a permanent, definite organization among us, with a general headquarters or national or international club-house. The Stations and their local groups would themselves be the framework of such a permanent organization. The desire for some kind of permanent organization keeps cropping out in these expedition letters. What better way of getting one than through our Stations, which are the work of volunteers from among you yourselves, represent you, are controlled in all save general allegiance by their local members and which would give, already in operation, a large number of cooperating club-houses to the permanent organization all over the world? The traveler or adventurer could drop in on comrades or be within reach of them almost anywhere he went.

Most of all, it would bind us all closer together in the general comradeship that is coming to be such a real thing among us.

We are of all kinds, classes and degrees, yet we meet in friendly spirit, each finding in the others the bond of a common feeling for the strong, clean, real things of life and the real brotherhood that always lies deep down in men of this type, needing only the assurance of the other man's friendliness to bring it to the surface. And we of the Camp-Fire *are* democracy, *real* democracy. The world never needed the spirit of friendliness and democracy as it needs it now. We of Camp-Fire have both. It's up to us to cherish them, to make them stronger, to pass them on. While statesmen mouth and evade, we are building up something that is real, and building it quietly, naturally, without preaching or pinning medals on ourselves. Just acting natural and letting the ordinary common or garden human friendliness in us come to the surface to get a breath of air once in a while.

The Expedition is another step along the way. It brings us together in a definite common enterprise. By next issue I'll try to shape the general drift of the bunches of letters we've been publishing into a representative, numbered vote-form, covering as much ground as possible and giving every one of you an equal voice in giving final shape to our plans.

First, though, I want to give you, again but in brief form, the plan suggested by Marshall Hall which a good many of you have endorsed in your letters. It was published last Fall and some of its details will have slipped your mind in the interval. Mr. Hall is financial editor of one of the big Pittsburg dailies and his suggestions as to finances are those of an expert.

Rochester, Pa.

Shares $1 par; each take as many as he can. By all means under auspices of a museum, but instead of sending funds to it send to "*Adventure's* Fund for Scientific Exploration of the World." Put funds into tax-exempt municipal bonds of highest yield to be found, or, better, let a good bank or trust company use their judgment but buying only quickly convertible securities, and have contributions sent to them direct, they reporting to magazine. Appoint a committee, located in New York, with power to draw funds for expenses. No definite plans possible till we know amount of funds to be counted on; send contributions first.

Committee employs museum to do actual exploration. We choose where and what we want explored; it is *our* expedition. Photographer and an interesting writer with expedition. While expedition is on, drop one short story per issue and use space for interesting running account with full details of progress, plans, movements, etc., of expedition in the field.

Have lots of photos and full account. Publish at least 500 photos and full account of expedition in well bound volume with names but not amounts of all contributors; sold on subscription basis (no connection with magazine subscriptions), profits to go toward defraying expenses or even making profits for the permanent fund.

Our writer could send back daily reports by carrier pigeon, wireless, telegraph, cable or courier which could be syndicated readily to newspapers at space rates or on contract basis.

Print ballots on destination in magazine.

I have in mind at least five in Pittsburg who would, I am sure, contribute no less than $5,000 or more if solicited.—MARSHALL R. HALL.

Mr. Hall's plan looks good to me. Only I want the committee chosen by vote, not by my appointment. Also, if we get sufficient funds, I'd like to have more of our own people included besides the photographer and writer. Let the museum lead and control, taking what experts it needs for the work in hand, but there are experts among Camp-Fire even in scientific lines, there are plenty of artists, map-makers and motion-picture men as well as photographers, and heaven knows there are plenty among us who'd make the best guides and practical men in the world for any locality you picked out. Fighting men, if they're needed. If there's money enough I'd like to see as many of them as possible and usable added to the party, but the museum to do the final choosing from our candidates. I can't believe in divided authority on any stunt of that kind.

In the next issue I'll try to have that voting form and, if possible, the name of a bank or trust company to receive funds, with contributions withdrawable up to some fixed date if the more matured plans don't prove satisfactory to the contributors. Think I told you I'd heard one bank in the town is full of Camp-Fire members from the president's chair on down. We'd better get our committee chosen first and know who is to control funds before sending any money in, but the name of the bank could be put up for vote along with the other points.

Be mighty sure that I'm not going to handle those funds, so leave me out of the voting and I've already said I couldn't be on the committee. Can't is the word all right. I've got all the job on my hands now that I can handle. Some kind of bank looks right for the funds, but you'll get to vote on that.

Fellows, I think we're on our way.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: Jan., 1912 to Mid-Dec., 1920. Will pay ten cents each plus postage. Reading matter must be intact; covers not necessary.—Address ROBERT BAYLESS, 1003 Government St., Mobile, Alabama.

WILL SELL: All of 1917 except July; 1918 except first Jan. and Feb.; 1919, 1920 except May; 1921 except Jan., April, first May. Ten cents each, postpaid.—Address HENRI CASTONQUAY, 55 Allen St., Brockton, Mass.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

17. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

18. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

19. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

20. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Albania, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. South America Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil (except Pará and Amazonas), Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. South America Part 3
Algot Lange, care *Adventure*. Pará and Amazonas, Brazil. Topography, customs, hunting, fishing, agriculture, lumber, industry, climate and health.

25. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

26. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

27. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

28. ✠ Canada Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P.. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

29. ✠ Canada Part 2
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

30. ✠ Canada Part 3
George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. Canada Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

32. Canada Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

33. ✠ Canada Part 6
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

34. ✠ Canada Part 7
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

35. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

36. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

37. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

38. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

39. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
John B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

40. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

41. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks. Automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

42. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Howard A. Shannon, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

43. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

44. Eastern U. S. Part 4
Dr. R. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Robert Frothingham, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. Arthur Bent, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Thank You, Mr. Gray

THIS correspondent has been good enough to shed light from a new angle upon a subject that is of perpetual interest to "A. A." readers:

San Francisco.

I have noticed in "Ask Adventure" a number of queries from readers whether a boat one hundred feet long was large enough to make a voyage through the tropics and other similar questions. For their information I will state that there is in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, a boat presented to the city by the Norse colony here.

The inscription states that it is the *Gjoa*. It was built in 1872. The length is 70 feet, the beam 20 feet, and the registered tonnage 47. I call attention to this because it was the boat selected by Captain Roald Amundsen for his Arctic explorations. He sailed on June 16, 1903, spent two years in King William's Land and in 1905 made the Northwest Passage—the only time it has ever been done—and arrived in San Francisco in October, 1906.

I think we are liable to be too much influenced in our judgment of what can be done in small boats by the sight of the enormous ships of today and to forget that most exploration has been done in boats of less, and often very much less, than hundred-footers.—A. Gray.

About Foxes

COULD Joseph's coat of many colors have been made out of foxskins?

Question:—"I would like a little information in regard to black or silver fox in your part of the country. Any and all information you can give me in regard to them will be greatly appreciated."—A. A. Manthey, Princeton, Wis.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—The red fox: Length over all up to thirty-five inches, of which the tail will be a full half; stands up to eighteen inches at the shoulders, this measurement being approximately his girth; and weighs from five to thirty-five pounds. His nose is sharp and pointed, as are his ears; tail bushy and heavily haired; four toes and dew-claw on each foot, the four toes armed with curved claws.

They live in dens in the rocks, burrows in the sides of hills and under boulders, hollow logs, or any crack or crevice that is dry and warm and secluded. They are night feeders, hunting their food between night-down and sun-up, and sleep out in the sun in the day-time. They seldom travel farther than five miles from their dens, and their food consists of rabbits, groundhogs, rats and mice, partridges and other birds, and even frogs. They den up in pairs, male and female, only the aged or outlawed male being found separately.

They mate once a year, during January or February, the period of gestation being the same as the cat's, fifty days, and produce from one to six at a litter.

Skin value, last year's quotations, from fifty cents to twenty-five dollars.

And that covers, too, the black and the silver fox, with two exceptions—color of fur and the value.

For the red fox, the cross fox, the silver fox, and the black fox are but different color phases of the same animal. Silver, black, cross and red fox have been found in the same litters, whose parents were both reds.

Nor has the reason for these different colors been found. Authorities have failed as yet, so far as I know, to get to the bottom of the question, though many theories have been advanced. That the red is the original color, and the others "sports" (tricks of nature, literally) is one theory; that the black is the original, from which the red evolved, and the present-day blacks throwbacks, is another; and a dozen other theories. But that's all they are—merely theories as yet.

The red fox is red, red running from almost a lemon color to nearly brown. The black fox is black, the softest, blackest black imaginable. The silver fox is black overlaid with ringed silver hairs. The cross-fox is almost anything not red or black. All have the same characteristic—the white tip at the extreme end of the tail.

In value the black and silver foxes range from two thousand to four thousand dollars for their pelts, and almost anything under a million for breeding-purposes—depending on their looks, ability, breeding worth, etc. Cross-foxes are worth from one hundred to one thousand dollars. Red fox from fifty cents to twenty-five dollars.

Fur dealers and farmers who breed fox that I know of are: B. I. Rayner, Alberton, P. E. I., Canada; John A. Lea, Summerside, P. E. I., Canada; E. R. Brow, Box 66, Charlottetown, P. E. I., Canada; Todd & Moore, St. Stephen, N. B., Canada; Nolt, Renfrew & Co., 41 Baude St., Quebec, Canada; Blake Vanatter, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada; Reid Bros., Bothwell, Ontario, Canada; Matthew Watson, Carcross, Yukon Territory, Canada; and L. B. Spofford, Buchanan, Mich.

Also it would pay you, if you intend going into the business of fox-raising, to subscribe to *The Black Fox Magazine*, published at 1400 Broadway, New York City, and to send for "The Culture of Black and Silver Foxes," by R. B. and L. V. Croft, B.A., M.D. This little booklet is published by and obtainable for sixty cents from *Rod and Gun in Canada*, Woodstock, Ont., Can.

But before you think seriously of raising beasties for their pelts, ponder the subjoined words which another A. A. man, speaking from hard experience, has to articulate upon the subject of

Fur-Farming

NO MONEY in it, says Mr. Solomons. And he tells why:

Question:—"I intend starting a fur-farm the following Summer, and if you could help me any in the choice of locations I would be very much obliged. There are many small islands ranging from the U. S. boundary line to Alaska, are there not? I want something between two and four thousand acres with fresh water on it and far enough from land to be out of the way of marauders.

A mountainous, rocky country with plenty of scrub growth would be about the thing. Could such land be bought direct from the Government, or must it be bought from private owners? What would be the possible price?"—JOHN R. MACVIDER, Schofield Barracks, H. T.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Yes, there are such islands, and you could get a permit from the Government to use them for fur-farming; but why do it?

The statistics of that industry, which I have carefully inspected, prove that it is a thoroughly unsuccessful business. There are a few such farms on the continent, one or two on this coast and a few on the Atlantic, in which much money has been invested, which are, or seem to be, moderately successful—far less so than was hoped or than is supposed by the public. Hundreds of others have started and failed, and others again are still in the process of failure.

It sounds fine. But all sorts of things work against you. The expensive pelts, especially of fox, are freak pelts—the black and silver-gray especially. They do not breed true, but throw back to the common. And even the apparent natural conditions you provide irk them and they die or deteriorate or don't breed, or swim off.

However, you want not a lengthy discussion but a crisp opinion of one who professionally looks into matters pertaining to industry in Alaska, and now you have it. I had a wife once who tried it years ago and under fairly favorable conditions. However, I am not prejudiced by her venture, but by the facts and figures collected by the Government and from many cases known to me personally.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in stamped International Reply Coupons for answer.

Ranching in Southern Mexico

CONDITIONS are good, and there's some prospect on the side of running into a mineral deposit:

Question:—"Am writing to ask for information on southern Mexico.

What part is most suitable for stock-raising?

Are there any mines in this part of Mexico? What kind? Are there any Americans there?

Do they have any trouble with the natives?

How may foreigners obtain land—by buying, homesteading or leasing?

Does the present Government encourage American immigration?

Would one have to take farm machinery from here or could they buy it there?

Are the cattle and horses raised there high grade or scrub?

Is there a good market there for stock and farm products?

What do cattle sell for per head? Horses? Sheep?

How much capital would one need to start?

How much would the fare be from Portland there by water, and how many days required to make the journey?"—P. H. ENNIS, Ontario, Ore.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—Practically all southern Mexico from sea-level to 5,000 and 6,000 feet is suitable for stock raising, including both the Pacific and Gulf coasts, so you see it is difficult for me to specify any particular district. All along the west coast and from Mazatlan there are large tracts of land suitable for raising cattle and goats, to the border of Guatemala.

There are only three States in Mexico which do not contain mineral deposits, and there are mines all along the west slope of the Sierra Madre Occidental or western range of mountains. The only States on the west coast not having mines are Colima and Chiapas. The mines are of silver, gold, copper, coal, lead, zinc, sulfur, manganese, and about all the commercial metals.

You will find Americans scattered all through Mexico, in even the smallest towns, and in the most unusual places you could imagine.

Naturally the natives try to take advantage of a foreigner, but as a usual rule they are easy to get along with. Of course you have to overlook many things, such as cheating you at every opportunity and so forth; but if a person reasonably minds his own business he should have little or no trouble with them. Of course one is a stranger in a strange land, and has to accommodate himself to the customs of the people.

The best way to obtain land is by buying it from some large land-owner as it takes seven thousand miles of red tape and many weary months to obtain Government land. Foreigners are prohibited from owning land thirty-two miles from the coast, but that can be avoided by forming a Mexican company with dummy stockholders, costing about fifty dollars for fees, etc. Land can be leased, but the best way is to buy it outright if you can.

As far as shown so far the present administration is encouraging the development of the country in every legitimate way, for foreigners are welcomed. A new land and colonization law is in formation respecting land, and if they do not actually invite you to Mexico they do not bother you in any way when you do come, provided you are a *bona-fide* settler with money to invest.

Farm machinery of all kinds can be obtained in Mexico, in the larger places, such as Mazatlan, Guadalajara, Mexico City, and other cities, but it would pay you to ship your machinery from the U. S. as you are only paying another profit, and no small one either, when you buy locally. Even second-hand stuff would pay to ship, also barbed wire, household goods, lumber, galvanized iron, nails, staples and everything of the kind needed. You could make some arrangements to buy wholesale, thus saving not one but several profits. As I am in the export business here I can arrange for you to buy wholesale in case you come down the west coast, which I would advise, on account of your present location.

Generally speaking the stock is mostly scrub, although some of the more progressive land-owners have imported blooded stock.

There is a good to fair market for stock and all farm produce, and at times it pays to export some of your crops.

It is hard to say what cattle are worth a head. Around here a medium steer is worth $30 to $40, milk cows $30 to $45 a head. Naturally depends how far from market, weight, etc. Horses from $15 to $100 a head, depending, of course, on the animal. Sheep are not raised to speak of, and I am unable to tell what they are worth; would be about $2 to $3 a head. On the range they buy them as low as 75 cents gold.

You should have at least $1,500 to $2,000 capital to start on a reasonable scale, although if you buy a small tract of land, build a brush-and-grass shack, eat beans and live more or less native style you can make quite a splash with $600 to $800. A big American dollar goes a long way down here. Labor is cheap; you should figure on letting the natives do the work and you do the heavier thinking.

From San Francisco to Mazatlan the fare is about $44 second-class, to Manzanillo $52, Acapulco $60, Salina Cruz $60, probably less. First-class about double. The time from San Francisco to Mazatlan, six days, to Manzanilla eight days, Acapulco ten days, Salina Cruz thirteen days.

There is quite a bit of information I am not sending you for lack of time as the mail closes shortly and I have a number of letters to write yet. However would be glad to hear from you further in regard to your contemplated trip as I can give you many tips.

Target-Shooting

AND a few words on barrel-lengths and gun-fanning:

Question:—"I thought I would write and get some information on revolvers. Which is the best, a 5½ or 6 inch barrel S. A. .45 Colt?

Could you tell me what gun-fanning is?

Any information you could give on target-shooting with the Colt .45 S. A. will be appreciated.

I have a Remington S. A. 7½-inch barrel which shoots the .44 Winchester cartridge. Would like to know when they first started making these guns, and when they stopped."—HURL R. BRIGGS, Gouverneur, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—The longest possible barrel is the length I would prefer for target-shooting; the shorter for carrying on the belt. I use the 5½-inch barrel on my .45 Colt, and consider it a good compromise for both. The 7½-inch seems to shoot better, however.

In target-shooting, stand with the weight evenly divided on both feet, facing quarteringly toward the mark. Take a deep breath, and exhale part of it. Line the sights on the bottom of the bull's-eye, and squeeze the trigger easily, not jerk it. Don't be afraid of the recoil, as the bullet has left the barrel before the recoil disturbs the aim.

The standard bull's-eyes are eight inches for fifty yards, and two inches for twenty yards.

Remingtons made the old .44-40 revolvers in the '70s and '80s, I believe. They were a very good revolver, too. Wish I could get one in good shape again.

To fan the Colt Single Action, or the Remington, hold the gun in the right hand, near the belt, and keep the trigger held back. Slap the hammer swiftly with the edge of the left palm, and you will fire six shots very fast. I don't think you will be apt to hit anything, however.

The Tubuai Islands

FURTHER news of Rapa, of which we have already learned something:

Question:—Having seen your name listed in *Adventure* as an authority on the South Sea Islands, I take the liberty of asking a few questions.

Concerning the Tubuai Islands in general and Rapa in particular, what are the chances for a man 28 years old with capital, or say about $1,000, to make a decent living?

Which island of this group would you recommend?

I have heard that Rapa has a population of about 200. Are they all natives?

Do they take kindly to foreigners?

Do ships touch there regular or often?

What would be the best way to get there cheaply and about how much would it cost?

What occupation could an American follow there to gain a living and retain the respect of the natives on the capital named?

I am tired of strict civilization, and as I am certain of going there within the next two years any information you can give, or any authority you can recommend, will be gratefully received.

I have knowledge of coastwise navigation (practical), boat-building, and wireless telegraphy. I am also a gas-engine expert."—JOSEPH E. GRIFFIN, Savannah, Ga.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—There is in the Tubuai (or Austral Islands) group nothing to attract and hold a white man of intelligence and moderate means. To begin, they are seldom visited, not even by the French, who have owned them since 1881. And the four islands composing this group are so small that the natives, in order to make both ends meet, are compelled to hustle. So that Tubuai, the jumping-off place of all things, must be to you as it has ever been to the majority of level-thinking South Sea rovers—an infinitesimal strip of land that is almost submerged in the immensity of a blue sea.

Rapa, or Oparo, lying far to the southeast, is one of the most picturesque islands in those latitudes. Some twenty miles in circumference, and with peaks rising two thousand feet high, this island is another French possession. Coal, or rather lignite, has been discovered there.

Rapa's population is almost *nil*, 220 at the most. European vices and diseases, introduced by old whalers that dropped in to fill the gaps in their crews, have played havoc with the inhabitants, who, when discovered by Vancouver in 1791, numbered 1,500.

As the Rapan men are particularly in demand as sailors throughout the South Sea there are but few males on the island. Which is why those who do remain at home take unto themselves as many as seven wives and roast in an eternal —— until such time as relief (invariably a ship with a short crew) comes to them.

What with seven wild women clamoring simultaneously to fill their lord's mouth and stomach with the miserable food that the island produces and all sorts of prohibition and curfew laws, life in Rapa is, at the most, a most hazardous adventure.

But the Rapans are a kind, jolly people. Especially do they delight in entertaining the white ship crews that touch once every two or three, and sometimes five, years.

More than one foolish sailor has tried to jump ship at Rapa. Ever on the alert is the one solitary white man of the island, an old French gendarme that, some forty years ago, sought out the island as a place where he could rewrite to his liking the novels of Alexander Dumas. The French will not permit any one to accept of Rapan hospitality but for a few days at the most.

All of which explains why I would not go to Tubuai or Rapa if I were you.

From Pig-Iron Town to Sazerac City

DON'T take offense, Pittsburg, at nicknaming you after the product that made you famous; nor you, New Orleans, for rubbing in the fact that since the Eighteenth Amendment you can't garner any more glory from the most delicious drink, maybe, that was ever shaken up:

Question:—"I am figuring on a trip to New Orleans and wish to go by river-boat. Is there a good line out of Pittsburg, or would it be advisable to connect at some other point? Please give me the probable cost of such a trip, best season to take the trip and length of time to go and return."—GEORGE A. WOLF, Altoona, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—There is no through packet line down the Ohio and Mississippi. If you could get in touch with one of the towboat companies, however, you might engage passage on a coal or iron fleet tow out of Pittsburg. Pittsburg newspapers will give you local passenger-boat sailings; probably harbor master would give you direct information addressing him.

You can take the trip in jumps, Pittsburg to Wheeling, thence to Cincinnati (perhaps clear to Louisville, one boat). Then another line to Cairo, or to Memphis. Memphis to Friar's Point, thence to Arkansas City, and Greenville. Thence to Vicksburg, and so on to New Orleans. You'd have to wait over a day or two at most of the transfers, adding to the cost.

It's about 2,000 miles, and I think actual transportation will come under 2 cents a mile. Stopovers, however, will add hotel expenses, etc. There are excursions, however, out of Pittsburg in April—used to be—to New Orleans, making whole trip. Then the towboat proposition would be a round trip, or one way, and you could take sea trip, New Orleans to New York City, home (write Morgan Line, Canal St., North River, N. Y. City, for information,) or better yet write Pittsburg Branch Thomas Cook & Son, Tours, who will be able to sell you transportation for the whole projected trip probably.

I've made the jump trip from Florence, Alabama, on Tennessee River, around to Paducah, up Ohio—a great trip to make.

April-May, and Sept., Oct., middle November best time, I think.

Coffee

HERE'S a valuable tip to coffee-users who desire to save money: Use the pulverized berry only. Dr. Goldsmith advances the thought in the following Q and A:

Question:—"I would like all the general information you can give me about the coffee industry in Brazil."—ABEL VAN DYKE, Muskegon, Mich.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—I can give you information regarding coffee in Brazil, but I suggest that in addition to what you receive from me, it would be well for you to consult some book on Brazil that you may find in your town library.

Coffee is raised in many parts of Brazil, but the chief center is the State of São Paulo, and the chief port of export is Santos, from which more coffee probably is sent than from any other city in the world. As you doubtless know, coffee grows on a small tree or bush, which needs some protection from the sun when it is very young. The berry or pod is round, and in this there usually grow two grains with their flat sides toward each other, the round sides completing the berry. The so-called "male berry" yields a round bean, and only one bean is found in the berry. The berries turn red, and then they become dark before they are gathered. The husks are removed, and then you have the coffee of commerce.

The Brazilian coffee of the better grade, particularly that which is called "Santos coffee," ranks high, and it is good coffee if one knows how to prepare it. It should be parched very brown and pulverized.

It is always wasteful to use any ground coffee. If the people of the United States would use only pulverized coffee, we, as a nation, could probably get along with one-quarter to one-third less coffee per annum than we are using at the present time. Brazil produces more coffee than any other country; and while some of the Maracaibo coffee and coffee from certain regions of Mexico and Central America, as well as some of the Oriental coffees, may be regarded as superior to the average Brazilian coffee, some very fine coffee is produced in Brazil.

Deck-Gear Terms

AND a few words on the course of training required of a man before he can become an editor. Also, about the job of purser:

Question:—"In my reading of nautical stories, of which I am very fond, there are several terms which I do not understand and therefore I am taking advantage of your free services offered in the *Adventure* magazine to get these straight. Kindly tell me how the following are used: (a) a marlinespike (b) a capstan-bar (c) a belaying-pin.

Are there any *competent* correspondence schools that teach navigation? What are the qualifications for a purser? *I. e.*, must he gain his post on his maritime merits, or is it an ordinary profession?

Would it be advisable to take a course in navigation for the purpose of being a captain or a mate, or must a person ship before the mast as a common sailor and work his way up (the way he ought to)?

I would like to spend a season or two on the sea and would like to know if a person with a clerical education would be eligible for any position on a passenger liner or any other kind of ship. This bunch of questions may seem to you to be a bevy of nonsensical twaddle, but I confess I take a lively interest in every separate one of them.

Please don't print my name or address."

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—A marlinespike is a steel spike, running to a point, which is used to open the strands of a line in splicing, or for several similar purposes. A capstan-bar is a wooden bar, usually strengthened and bound in parts with iron, which is inserted in the head of the capstan, which is a kind of a windlass, and is used in turning the capstan, in hoisting the anchor or in hauling in a cable. A belaying-pin is an iron pin, which sets in a hole in the pin-rail on the bulwarks, and to which are made fast portions of the running rigging. There are many competent schools for the purpose of teaching navigation. The knowledge of navigation is but a portion of the requirements for a ship's officer. He must necessarily have at least two years' experience before the mast before entitled to go up for examination for papers, unless he is the graduate of an approved nautical school-ship, where he gets intensive training in seamanship on shipboard and a part of the time at sea.

The purser should have some sea knowledge; be a fair accountant. He usually, where he does not owe his position to pull, goes up from the position of freight-clerk, which is the first clerical position on a passenger liner, open to the man who is a competent clerk but lacks sea experience. Sometimes the purser is taken from the office force of the steamship company. I would suggest that as a preliminary you get a clerical position with some steamship company, learn the ropes there and take a job as freight-clerk if you can get assigned to the work.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Tristan da Cunha

SEEING that neither inquirer nor "A. A." man mentioned the fact, I may as well add that Tristan da Cunha is an island belonging to the British Empire situated midway between South America and the Cape of Good Hope. . . . Sure I looked it up:

Question:—"Would like some or rather all the information you can give me concerning the island of Tristan da Cunha, which is a possession of England. I am going to live there if there is any chance at all.

I wrote to the British Embassy at Washington, D. C., but they could not furnish me any information, so I am looking to you to furnish me with all the information and help me all you can."—HARRY J. PROWS, Richmond, Ind.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—Tristan da Cunha is not a particularly promising location for a settler, whatever the settler's notions of comfort may be. The islanders depend utterly on passing vessels for groceries and clothes, and often a ship has passed six months or more, sometimes nearly a year, before the next one heaves in sight. Potatoes were sent there years ago, and grow well, however. There are thousands of sea-birds which can be eaten if one can stomach the strong fishy flavor of sea-birds, and the seas around yield plenty of fish.

There is nothing else whatever in the way of regular produce, nor does the island offer any great prospects of fertility.

So far as I can judge, there should be at present a population of about a hundred people all told; and when I called there—that's years ago—some folks had a few geese and chickens; there were a few pigs and sheep, and cows were eking out a scanty existence.

The family of Glass is the chief one there, and a Scot named William Glass I believe established the little settlement some time in the eighteen-twenties. If you really think of settling there, I advise you to write for full details of living conditions and desirability to Mr. Glass, Tristan da Cunha. I don't know which particular Mr. Glass to refer you to, but such a letter will get to the chief of the family anyhow.

I imagine somebody who could teach school would be most likely to find welcome there at present.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

McCULLOCH, MILAN E. Thirty-eight years, five feet ten inches, weighs about 165 pounds. Graduate of Ames, Iowa, Agricultural College, taught there for a time, later for fourteen months was Examiner, Agricultural Department, Federal Civil Service Department, Washington, D. C. During War was chemist in a chemical plant at Goldsboro, Md. Dec. 20th, 1919, he wrote his parents in Utica, N. Y. No trace since then. $60,000 awaits him. —Address E. EARLE AXTELL, Manager Masonic Service Bureau, Masonic Temple, Buffalo, N. Y.

BLACK, JOHN JACKSON. Born in Jackson County, Ala. Mother's name was Elizabeth; brothers Henry and Calvin, sister Mollie. Went to Texas in the '80s. I want to communicate with relatives.—Address S. J. BLACK, 2315 N. 11 Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

BOBONIE, GEORGE. Home in western part of Pennsylvania. Last heard from was with the Supply Co., 69th Field Artillery, West Point, Ky., in September, 1918. If you see this, George, please write. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. E. LEE, 107 W. Yates Street, East Syracuse, N. Y.

LE EFFE, JACK Five feet six inches. Discharged from Canadian Army in 1917. Served in 2nd Princess Pat's. Nicknamed in regiment "Devil Jack." Was said to have left for India. Any news from him will be appreciated.—WALTER VAN DUZEN, 988 Finlay Avenue, New York City, N. Y.

IURLEY, JAMES. Last heard from at Milwaukee in 1916. Left there for construction job in Arkansas. ollows air construction work as foreman and has worked on number of Chicago Foundation Co's. contracts. Information will be appreciated by his brothers.—Address L. T. 437, care of *Adventure.*

MAHONEY, ARTHUR. Home in Brooklyn, N. Y. Please write, we lost your present address.—Address RALPH WILSON, 2916 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

RUCKER, LULU WILLIAMS. Last heard of in St. Louis, Mo., twenty years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MAY PARK, 4540 Gratz St., Phila., Pa.

JENKINS, CHAS. WESTLEY. (Shorty.) Age about twenty-eight, five feet one or two inches tall, dark complexion. Last heard of in March, 1920, at Lugeville, Wis. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address A. C. JACOBS, 811 Main St., Marinette, Wis.

WOULD like to hear from Hefley, Linneman, Friday, Hardy, Rainbolt, McClellan, Creighton or any of the gang that rode the No. 7 and No. 11 cars in 1918-1919. Lots of D-E-F and A men here.—Address JAS. R. STONE, care National Casket Co., Dallas, Texas.

REEVES, JOHN R. Last heard from in Walnut Grove, Arizona, over thirty years ago. Was in El Paso, Texas before that time. His partner was A. A. Moore. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—Address, L. T. 438, care of *Adventure.*

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

OWEN, JACK. My old pal. Last heard from in Fallon, Nevada, in 1913. At that time with his father, developing gold claim—Address CARL GOODWIN, Box 111 Gallup, N. M.

McFARLAND, EDWARD. Last heard of at Beggs, Okla., on the Texas Oil Co. lease in Section 11-14-11. About five feet six inches in height, blue eyes, black hair, fair complexion and about twenty-three years old. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address C. YOUNG, Norman, Oklahoma.

WARD, WALTER G. Left home in March, 1919. Was mess-sergeant at Camp Green, Charlotte, N. C. Age twenty-seven, height five feet four inches, light hair, blue eyes. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. WALTER G. WARD, 403 S. Church Street, Charlotte, N. C.

SMART, WILLIAM R. Born in Caledonia, Ontario. Is about sixty years old. Last seen in Hamilton, Ontario, about thirty-five years ago. He was a railroad man then. If he is still alive I have important news for him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ALEX LERMUSIK, R. F. D. No. 6, Seattle, Wash.

DATES, ALFRED THOMAS. Last heard of at entrance of U. S. in World War, when he enlisted in the artillery at Oakland, Cal. Any one knowing anything about him please communicate with his father.—Address ALFRED THOMAS, Hospital, Veterans' Home, Napa Co., Cal.

LANE, EDWARD. Last heard of in White Oaks, New Mexico, in Spring of '1920. Please write to your former El Paso friend. Have been assigned to San Domingo. Address.—PVT. JOSEPH L. McLAUGHLIN, Hdqtrs. Co., 15th Reg., 2nd Brigade, U. S. Marines, San Pedro De Macoris, Dominican Republic.

WOOD, MARION. Husband. Age twenty-nine, height five feet ten inches, weight 160 pounds, blue eyes, light hair. Was wearing dark-gray suit, brown shoes, and carried a brown traveling bag. Right eye red from being burned from steam, and first finger on right hand stiff. Everything all right at home. Please write.—Address MRS. M. WOOD, 801 Commerce St., Shreveport, La.

WRIGHT, CECIL. Last heard of in Winnipeg, Canada, where he worked as a chauffeur. Left for Los Angeles in 1914. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address G. G. MERRICK, 1018 E. Harvard St., Glendale, Cal.

HARRIES or HARRIS, HUGH M. Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan about 1912. Born in Winnipeg, Canada. Any information of his whereabouts will be appreciated by an old school friend.—Address G. G. MERRICK, 1018 E. Harvard St., Glendale, Cal.

LOCKWOOD, ROBERT L. Was on U. S. S. *Woolsey,* at San Diego, Cal., in April, 1920. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write.—Address F. G. WOLFE, Gen. Del., Kansas City, Mo.

WILSON, ANNA, MARGARET, EDWARD. Lived in Burt, Kossuth County, Iowa. Alexander Wilson farmed between Burt and Bancroft. Robert Wilson studied dentistry in Iowa City. Sam Wilson in Nebraska. The above persons were last heard from in 1890. Wm. Wilson left Cramps Shipyard, Philadelphia, Pa., on the S. S. *Alemea* for San Francisco. Any information concerning the above will be appreciated.—Address PHILIP FAUNCE, 4829 Mulberry St., Frankford, Philadelphia, Pa.

SHEPARD, HAROLD NORTH. Last heard of about five years ago in Los Angeles, Cal. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address J. MARTIN, 111 West 127th St., New York, N. Y.

WOULD like to hear from any of the old gang who were in Co. A, 40th Inf. from July, 1917, to January 18th, 1919.—Address Ex. CPL. JAMES F. KING, Wynona, Okla.

MENARD, PATRICK. Brother. Known as Patrick De May. Served in the Marine Corps under the latter name. Last heard from at Salt Lake City, Utah. Mother died since that time. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated—Address HELENE RUTH MENARD, Box 715, Lewistown, Mont.

BROWN, GEO. C. Believed to have been a salesman who visited Geo. W. Barnes at his home at Jackson, Tenn., in Nov. 1898; also Alf Bensinger, formerly agent for the New York Life Insurance Co., at Jackson, Tenn. also Gus Louis who became proprietor of the Geo. W. Barnes Meat Market, at Jackson, Tenn., after the decease of Geo. W. Barnes. Any information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address DR. WM. E. ARNOLD, F. P. E., 812 W. Broad St., Elyria, Ohio.

PARMETER, JOHN. Uncle. Last heard from fifty years ago from Athens, Ohio. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated—Address J. H. PARMETER, Logansport, R. R. No. 2-B, Cass Co., Indiana.

THE following have been inquired for in either the March 10th or March 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of inquirers from this magazine:

ADAMS, HARRY C.; Blaine, Peggie; Brady, Frank J.; Burns, William (Slippery); Clapp Family; de Yattos; Du Valle, Alvin; Burton, Harry; Earl, Allen; Fawkes, Harry K.; Johnson, Lawrence R.; Kister, Norval L.; Lewis, William J.; McCullock, Milan C.; McLane, C. A.; McLaughlin, Stewart H.; McLauren, Joe; Nelson, Adolf; Scott, David; Shanghai, Pressey; Todd, R. Hubert; Tolly, Frank; Weimer, Jacob.

MISCELLANEOUS—Any one who was in Militia Division Q. M. C. Base Hospital, Camp Jackson, S. C.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Abrams, Wesley; Bertsch, Miss Elizabeth; Bonner, Maj. J. S.; Butterfield, E.; Barrett, Raymond; Buckley, Ray; Bollinger, C. J.; Brown, W. E.; Bennett, Mr. & Mrs.; Bushby, Ed. F.; Bailey, Dick; Bryson, Clarence F.; Courtlandt, Victor; Cook, Wm. N.; Cook, Elliot D.; Connor, A. M.; Crawn, G. R.; Chink; Clark, Wilfred J.; Cramer, Chas A.; Corbett, Fred P.; Coles, Bobby; Carr, John; Carpenter, Robert S.; Coston, O. A.; Chatvaire, J.; De Brissac, Sr. Ricardo; de Rouffiquac, J.; Evans, B. R., Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Farnsworth, Donald; Gale, Geo. A.; Gallagher, Owen; Grimm, H. C.; Harris, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Howard, Charlie; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Hughes, Frank E.; Hooker, Wm. Francis; Hailstorm Chief; Jones, John Paul; Jackson, Robert R.; Kuckaby, Wm. [illegible]; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Klug, Charles C.; Kelly, C. H.; [illegible]sey, Jack; Lovett, Harold S.; Lafler, Harry; [illegible] M[illegible]., Wm. R.; Jock, Lonely; Lauder, Harry; McAd[illegible] W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; [illegible]elson, Aleck; Minor, Dr. John; McKee, A. L.; McNai[illegible]ry S.; McNickle, W. A.; McCafferty, Charles B.; Nich[illegible] Charles B.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nylander, Towne[illegible]Hara, Jack; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott[illegible] C.; Phillips, Buffington; Pigeon, A. H.; Pulis, H[illegible]ner Geo. A.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wagoner Bo[illegible]an, Chas. B.; Ryder, H. S.; Raymond, C. E.; Run[illegible]lle, [illegible]rill G.; Roberts, Walter; Rutherford, Max; St. Claire Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Smith, C. O.; S[illegible]a Ted; Stocking, C. B.; Sloan, Charles A.; Stewart, [illegible]st J.; Spencer, Robert; Schafer, Geo.; Tripp, Edward [illegible]Terry, Lambert; Von Gelucke, Byron; Van Tyler, Chest[illegible] Wiley, Floyd, Ward, Frank B.; Williams, Roger; Woel[illegible]rich; Yames, Reubin L.;

MISCELLANEOUS—Third Officer, S. S. *Lake Elmsdale*; WS-XV; L. T. 348; No. 439; S 177284; WWT, I. C. H.; 2480; T. W. S.; C. C. C.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

APRIL 10TH ISSUE

Besides the complete novelette mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

GOO LASH — ***Ben F. Baker***
How the overalls got into the camp chowder.

THE HUNGRY WORLD — ***F. St. Mars***
A European lynx stalks and is stalked.

A SON OF STRIFE A Three-Part Story Part II — ***Arthur D. Howden Smith***
Matteo strikes a bargain with the "Old One."

THE SHIP REMEMBERS — ***Frank H. Shaw***
The way of a man with a ship—and a ship with a man.

REVERSE IRISH — ***Frederick J. Jackson***
"*Short-Hand*" *Conway* develops a new technique with the Colt.

JOHN JOCK TODD — ***Robert Simpson***
How Scotch blood reacts to Africa and petty tyranny.

OLD SMOOTH BORES — ***Farnham Bishop***
Civil-War strategy in a Spanish-American revolution.

DESERT MEN — ***Walter R. Marsden***
Water!

Bab—or Tish

Mystery or Humor—Love or Adventure

Which Do You Prefer?

Mischievous, bewitching Bab—adventurous, your [illegible]ed, old-maidish Tish—these are only two [illegible] famous characters Mrs. Rinehart has created. There are scores of others, and her stories are as varied as her characters.

Adventures that set your pulses aracing, romances that stir your very heart strings, mysteries that thrill you to the core—all woven together into stories that keep you spellbound from first page to last. That is what has given Mrs. Rinehart ten million readers. That is what has made her our foremost woman writer.

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Special Introductory Edition at ½ Price

12 Splendid Books—3,000 pages—that will hold you spellbound. Stories of fascinating adventure, of breathless mystery, of young love, of daring intrigue; stories that have made Mrs. Rinehart our foremost woman writer. All these may now be yours at ½ the original publishers' price—if you act at once.

Why We Can Make This Offer

This offer has been made possible not only because of the drop in the price of paper and binding, but because of Mrs. Rinehart's own generosity.

Mary Roberts Rinehart makes big sums from her writings; she spends them just as freely. In order to make this first collected edition of her best works go; in order to enable us to make you a price that would be within the reach of every single one of her admiring readers, she has agreed to accept exactly *One-tenth* of her usual rate of royalty—*on this first edition only*. This means that those who act at once will get a bargain such as has been rarely offered before—which we may never be able to duplicate.

$30,000 For a Single Story

Ten million readers have eagerly devoured Mrs. Rinehart's stories—and begged for more; hundreds of thousands have rushed to moving picture theatres to see these stories in dramatized form; in crowded theatres her plays are daily applauded by enthusiastic thousands.

Nor is it any wonder, for Mrs. Rinehart has the magic touch that captures the hearts of all readers, men and women, old and young alike. Realizing this, magazine publishers are glad to pay fabulous sums for her stories—for just one of the stories here offered you a great magazine paid $25,000—for another, $30,000. And all of these stories are yours to examine without one cent of expense if you sign and mail the coupon today!

SEND NO MONEY

But Mail the Coupon **To-Day!**

See Offer on Coupon

Here Are the Stories You Get---

Sight Unseen
The Confession
The Amazing Interlude
Bab
23½ Hours Leave
The Circular Staircase
The Poor Wise Man
Dangerous Days
When a Man Marries
The Window at the White Cat
Affinities
Tish
Love Stories
The Man in Lower Ten

3 VOLUMES-Conan Doyle-FREE

We have been fortunate enough to secure a few sets of three of Conan Doyle's latest books—the best Sherlock Holmes stories. While they last, we will give them away—FREE—to the first purchasers of this Special Introductory Edition of Mary Roberts Rinehart. There are not nearly enough of these sets to go around, so only those who act at once can be sure of securing them.

Take No Risk—Send in the Coupon Now!

Review of Reviews Co., 30 Irving Place, New York

Cut Coupon Here

Adv. 3-22

Review of Reviews Co.
30 Irving Place
New York

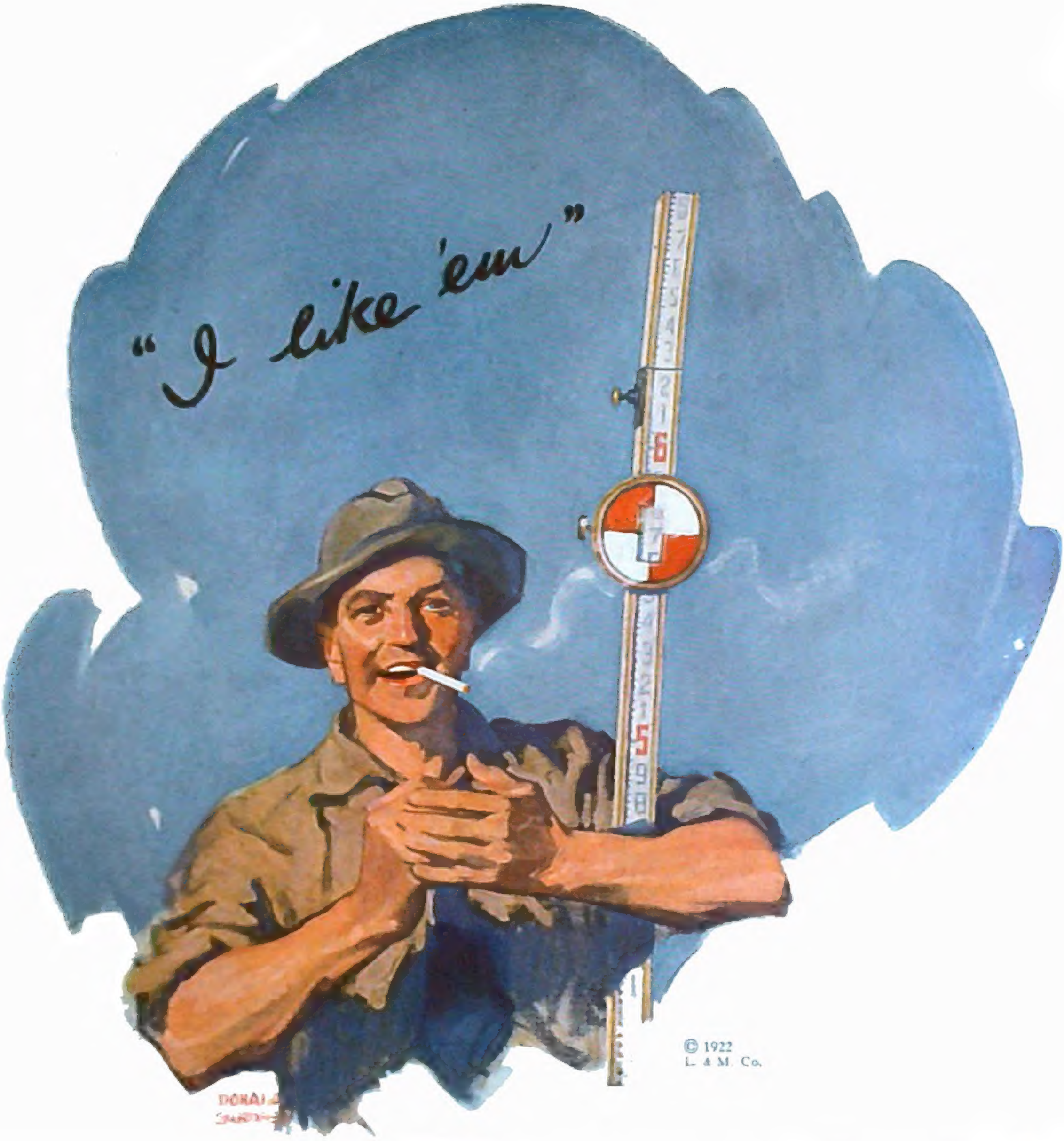
Send me *on approval*, charges paid by you, the 12 volumes of Mary Roberts Rinehart's best stories. Also the 3-volume set of Conan Doyle's latest stories. If I keep the books I will send you $1.50 in 5 days, and then $1.50 a month for 10 months for the Rinehart set only and keep the 3 volumes of Doyle FREE. Otherwise I will, within 10 days, return both sets at your expense.

NAME ....

ADDRESS ....

OCCUPATION ....

For the sumptuous new Artcraft Binding, more durable than ordinary leather, add three more payments.



© 1922
L. & M. Co.

Chesterfield

CIGARETTES

Of Finest Turkish and Domestic Tobaccos—Blended

They Satisfy

Taste is a matter of tobacco quality

We state it as our honest belief that the tobaccos used in Chesterfield are of finer quality (and hence of better taste) than in any other cigarette at the price.

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.